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A CANDIDATE FOR TRUTH

"God offers to every mind its choice between truth and repose. Take which you please,— you can never have both. . . . He in whom the love of repose predominates will accept the first creed, the first philosophy, the first political party he meets,— most likely his father's. . . . He in whom the love of truth predominates will keep himself aloof from all moorings, and afloat. He will abstain from dogmatism, and recognize all the opposite negations between which, as walls, his being is swung. He submits to the inconvenience of suspense and imperfect opinion, but he is a candidate for truth, as the other is not, and respects the highest law of his being."

EMERSON. *Intellect.*

A CANDIDATE FOR TRUTH

BY

J. D. BERESFORD

AUTHOR OF "THE EARLY HISTORY OF JACOB STAHL"
"THE INVISIBLE EVENT," ETC.

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CONTENTS

BOOK ONE

CECIL BARKER

Chapter		Page
I	"Sixty-three"	3
II	Small Fry	15
III	Secretarial Duties	25
IV	Sunday	50
V	Barker *v.* Murgatroyd	76
VI	Barker *v.* Woodhouse	92
VII	Life and Letters	116
VIII	Barker *v.* Stahl	137

BOOK TWO

MRS. LATIMER

IX	Washington House	157
X	The Palimpsest	182
XI	Mrs. Latimer's Spectacles	201
XII	Playing the Game	216
XIII	Price and Mallinson's	237
XIV	Various Encounters	265
XV	Other Enemies	278
XVI	Escalade	291

CONTENTS

BOOK THREE

THE TURN OF THE ROAD

Chapter		Page
XVII	Aspects of Failure	313
XVIII	Aspects of Success	324
XIX	Aspects of Destiny	355

BOOK FOUR

CLIMAX

XX	Betty	373
XXI	Indecision	397
XXII	Confession	411
XXIII	Drift	426
XXIV	More Leeway	442
XXV	Climax	469
	Epilogue	485

BOOK ONE

CECIL BARKER

A CANDIDATE FOR TRUTH

BOOK ONE

CECIL BARKER

CHAPTER I

"SIXTY-THREE"

1.

CECIL BARKER'S net had a wide mesh. The net was not of his own weaving, it was an inheritance, but among the many nets from which he might have chosen, he selected that with the widest mesh. That choice was the only one possible for Barker; it could hardly be called a free act. He was born with the gambler's spirit; none but the largest fish had any attraction for him, and since he had elected to be a fisher, he had daily staked his professional reputation, even risked much of his capital — another inheritance — in bold casts for the largest, strongest, and most elusive quarry.

The metaphor holds good in so many analogies that it is difficult to avoid it, even though it suffers from over-use and age — it is, in this form, nearly nineteen hundred years old. Nevertheless it has this supreme inappropriateness in the present case — Barker himself avoided it with diligence. He had innumerable apt metaphors at the tip of his tongue, metaphors subtle and insinuating, but this was not among them. It was banal, he might have said, but

he had a reason that was deeper seated — to speak of himself as a fisherman was to label himself a descendant of Peter, to advertise his purpose. And whether Barker cast a wide net to drag sea-bottom, or, the thing he preferred, projected the finest of silken lines with a deft cast, and allowed his inimitably natural fly to take the water like thistledown, he never advertised his purpose till he had some hold of his fish. He stalked the wariest of fish, and he never allowed his shadow to fall over the water. The metaphor of his wide mesh must here be figured as that of his landing-net, his criterion for a fish that could be counted sizable.

Barker undoubtedly avoided the label of fisherman, but he adopted others. Chief among his labels was the one already indicated, that of gambler; and all gamblers are not fishermen. It seems that he acknowledged the genus and denied the species.

Adopting, then, the larger, generic metaphor, it may be said that Barker had staked his extraordinary abilities on an unusual card. He had a name for it; he called it " the white card "— in rank it came above the ace of trumps. He had given the go-by to kings and queens; and this in a literal as well as in a metaphorical sense, for he had resigned his chaplaincy to a Royal Duke, had scoffed at preferment, and had now spent twenty years in an unclean parish in Camden Town. Such was his ambition to turn up his white card. But the thing cannot be analyzed figuratively, though it is well to retain the idea that the Hon. and Rev. Cecil Barker was most certainly a gambler.

There is his own word to prove it — better still, there is his record. . . .

He lived in a small house in a dull little road, five minutes walk from the High Street. His full address was 63, Acacia Avenue, and his was one of the three

arboreous strips of front garden that justified the name of the road. William Boyle at 28, on the other side of the way, had a plane-tree as well.

Parochially, Barker's address was simply " sixty-three," no further designation was necessary. That passed, even outside the immediate circle of his parishioners; the Post Office people understood that symbol. " 63," Camden Town, or The Rev. Cecil Barker, London, were addresses that involved no delay in transmission. He was not on the telephone, but his telegraphic address was " Others," London.

2.

One's first real impression of Cecil Barker was almost invariably gleaned at Sunday supper. The evensong sermon at St. Mark's which preceded this entertainment, provided no certain data. It was a long sermon as a rule, anything from fifty minutes to an hour and a quarter, and though distinctive by reason of certain qualities of pertinence and directness, and by the absence of the usual formulæ of phrase and sentiment, it did not always hold the attention to the final and too often welcome " And now. . . ." One reason for this partial failure of Barker's sermons lay outside his own control. He had a powerful voice that in speaking frequently dropped to a vibrant bass; but in preaching he kept to his middle register, which was resonant — at times too resonant. For St. Mark's — a great, oblong, brick barn of a church — was full of echoes, and as one sat in the midst of that fusillade of sound, straining to separate the words of the preacher from the bouncing echo which flew back, mingled with and confused the original trumpet, one became hypnotized and lost the sequence, one began to think of water-

falls and the sea and railway goods-yards, and caught oneself up suddenly in the middle of a tempting dream that had not lasted quite long enough for one's head to find a position of rest. That was all very well for the choir, but even the device of reverent attention with a hand over the eyes did not save those who sat in the nave. The Vicar would not refer to one's lapse at supper, but one feared horribly lest he might have seen.

After service everyone was very wide awake.

Sunday supper was an experience. You might meet anyone — the editor of a London paper, a Cabinet Minister, a member of the remotest elect in society whom you were uncertain how to address, or, on the other hand, you might meet someone recently discharged from Pentonville or Holloway. . . .

If you did not sit next to Fred Boyle the lay-reader — son of the William Boyle who boasted the plane-tree — or to one of the temporary curates, or to some other semi-official habitué who took his position seriously and considered it essential to talk to you, to "draw you out," you had an excellent opportunity to study the Vicar during supper.

In appearance he was not noticeably clerical. The buttonless waistcoat, the gold cross, and the collar that fastened behind were unmistakable badges, it is true, but with these he wore a black cloth jacket that any layman might have worn. Even the three distinctly clerical items of apparel were not usually in evidence; but he retained them on Sunday evenings. Other marks of the cleric were lacking also. The ready, rather one-sided, altogether fascinating smile, the blue eyes which seemed to appreciate to the full all that was best in life, the general impression received of a brilliant personality with a strong bent towards the humorous — these gave no hint of as-

ceticism or bigotry. Indeed, Cecil Barker was no bigot. Even the clean-shaven, flexible, rather thin-lipped mouth, framed in the deep lines that often distinguish the actor, did not produce any effect of austerity. And since some picture of the man is so necessary, however inadequate it may be, it is well to note that Barker was rather a small man, not more than five feet six or seven, that he was noticeably bald, and that his age was forty-eight.

These observations are superficial; they represent first impressions only — just such observations as were being made by Wilfred Cairns, in fact, on the occasion of his first appearance at "sixty-three" one Sunday evening in July.

Cairns had been recommended to "see Barker." The recommendation had come from Cairns's solicitor, to whom a confession of trouble had been made. Cairns's trouble was not financial. He had a daughter of nineteen who had been educated in the great principles of personal liberty, of freedom of thought and action, and this young woman had just made her first declaration of independence — she had declared her intention of sharing her life with a man of forty. Cairns might have objected less if the man had not been married. His difficulty was that Freda had been too apt a pupil; she confronted her father with his own arguments. Cairns was unable to deny that the principles Freda enunciated so accurately had been in his own mouth for years, and that they were, moreover, magnificently applicable to the girl's outrageous proposal.

He had been driven back to the theorist's first and last line of defence.

"Oh, but, my dear girl," Cairns had said, with the gesture of one who seeks to convince an inferior intelligence, "can't you see that it would be all very

well if everyone had come to see things as you and I see them? The principle is right and sound enough. But we've got to make everyone accept that principle before we can put it into practice. I believe in the nationalization of land, but if I had a freehold I should not think it necessary to hand it over to the State under present conditions. We've got to educate, to talk about these things freely to anyone and everyone, until the time is ripe for putting things into practice."

"If you believe in the truth of your principles," Freda had replied, "why shouldn't you preach them by living up to them yourself? It's only funk that stops you. I want to *do* things. I'm not afraid."

Cairns had waved his hands again, and tried another issue. "The man's married," he had said. "That takes away all the dignity from your action. You are not taking up the position of the Godwins or the Shelleys. . . ."

"What about George Eliot?" Freda had retorted.

The difficulty in arguing with Freda was that the child, with all her notions, was so curiously logical.

Harold Gray, Cairns's solicitor, had at first suggested the exercise of parental authority; the girl was under age, but Cairns recognized that for him such a position was untenable. The recommendation to see Cecil Barker had been accepted with some scepticism at first. Cairns had no faith in parsons.

Gray had looked very earnest. "There's not another man like Barker in London," he had said.

3.

Cairns had written for an appointment, and any enthusiasm he may have felt as a reflection of Gray's earnestness had been damped by the invitation to ser-

vice and Sunday supper at "sixty-three." But his attitude towards straws at the moment, and perhaps the incentive of a strong curiosity, had prompted him to accept the invitation.

The sermon had not impressed him, and he had not escaped the soporific effects of the echo.

Coming out of church he had been waylaid by Fred Boyle.

"Mr. Cairns?" asked Boyle.

"None other," replied Cairns.

"My name's Boyle," said Fred. "The vicar told me to look out for you, and show you the way round to sixty-three."

This was an attention, and helped Cairns somewhat to avoid the feeling that the casual invitation to a general entertainment was something of a slight.

When the vicar came into the dining-room after all his guests had begun supper under the direction of Fred and the curate, he had singled out Cairns for first notice.

"My dear fellow, I want to have a long talk with you afterwards," he said, and Cairns received the impression that his affairs were, after all, of the profoundest importance to Cecil Barker.

Unhappily, Cairns was at the foot of the table, and young Boyle, the lay reader (he had read the First Lesson abominably, which had not endeared him to Cairns, who was critical in such matters) took upon himself the full responsibility of the visitor's entertainment.

Cairns's opportunity for observation was limited as a consequence. Young Boyle was a solid person, a ledger clerk with a weakness for whisky, whom the vicar had taken in hand and diverted to noble ambitions. Boyle's attitude towards the vicar at that time was one of ponderous admiration, and he weighed

down Cairns with platitudinous eulogy of Barker's qualities.

Cigarettes were passed round after supper while the guests remained in their places; movement was hardly possible in such limited accommodation, and for a few minutes conversation became less parochial.

"Gray tells me you are a Socialist, Cairns," called out the vicar from his distant end of the table.

"I think most of us have some sort of a right to live," replied Cairns.

"You'll have to come up here and talk to Major Bateson," said the Vicar. "He seems to think we've only got a right to die."

Major Bateson, an elderly man with a long white moustache, muttered something inaudible, that might have been a disclaimer.

"That is the usual attitude, I believe," said Cairns.

"Not down here," said the Vicar. "We are all Socialists in this corner of London."

"Don't mean the same thing," muttered the Major.

The other members of the party had relapsed into silence, but a well-dressed, pretty woman opposite to Cairns suggested that no one quite knew what Socialism meant.

"It means having as much respect for other people as you have for yourself," replied the Vicar.

"Hear! hear!" put in Cairns.

"But do you think we *can?*" asked the pretty woman.

"No, not unless you try," said Barker, with his whimsical smile, and then continued: "My dear Clara, you'll never know what it is to be contented while you have two footmen in powder to wait upon you."

"Oh, that's absurd, Cecil," said the pretty woman. She dropped the end of her cigarette into her un-

touched glass of water, and rose to go. Some of the men stood up.

"Who is that?" whispered Cairns to Boyle.

"The Countess of Fawley," replied Fred with unction.

4.

Barker had other patients waiting to see him, but he gave Cairns a full half-hour's attention.

At the outset Cairns was inclined to make reserves. He approached all parsons with a certain half-cynical suspicion. He was an agnostic on intellectual grounds, and was wont to boast that many of his relations prayed weekly for his return to the arms of the Church. He looked for the expression sooner or later of what he imagined must be Barker's ulterior object; and in stating his case with reservations, Cairns laid some stress on his own lack of faith.

Barker put that on one side as immaterial. "I've had a mystic Church here for twenty years," he said.

"What about the Thirty-nine Articles?" asked Cairns.

"We've grown out of all that bosh, my dear fellow," said Barker.

So candid an admission put Cairns more at his ease; he warmed to a criticism of the Church's methods, and was not contradicted, and then he realized that he was encroaching on valuable time, and came to the point with a franker statement of his difficulty.

"Nineteen, eh?" asked Barker, and he twisted his mouth to one side, and looked shrewdly at Cairns. "How many other children?" he asked.

"Two."

"Girls?"

"Boy and a girl; twins."

"H'm!" said Barker thoughtfully. "And are you bringing them up in the same damned silliness?"

Cairns started as if his face had been suddenly slapped. "The principle . . ." he began, but Barker stopped him.

"What's the use of a principle that doesn't work?" he said. "Your *principle*"—he laid a contemptuous stress upon the word—"is all very fine and beautiful, no doubt, but as soon as it's put into practice, you have to find help to get you out of the difficulties your principle has landed you in." He changed his tone, and added: "Let me come down and talk to the young woman, and clear away some of the silly, sentimental ideas you have been teaching her all these years."

Cairns got to his feet, and took up a position on the hearth-rug. He was partly dominated by the stronger personality opposed to him, but he had no intention of admitting that he was wrong in the matter of theory.

"I should like you to come down immensely," he said. "I believe you could persuade Freda out of her present foolishness. But when you come we must have a talk about this 'principle' of mine."

Cecil Barker smiled; his face was lighted by that look of radiant certainty, the look of one who has been many days in the great presence.

"Never mind the principle, my dear fellow," he said, and laid his hands on Cairns's arm—"yours or mine. I'm not trying to convert you; why should you show yourself more fanatic than I?"

Cairns laughed. "There's something in that," he said. "Well, when will you come? Can you stay the night? I'm living down at Rickmansworth."

"No, I can't stay. I'll come down to-morrow afternoon."

As Cairns was leaving, an idea occurred to him. "By the way," he said, "I met a man yesterday who might be a good 'case' for you. He seems in a pretty bad way."

"Morally, physically, financially . . .?" suggested Barker.

"All three," laughed Cairns. "I'm afraid he's no good, no grit; but you might be able to do something with him."

"How did you know him?" asked Barker.

"Oh, he and his wife were acquaintances of mine. I used to go to their house sometimes years ago. She was rather a bad lot, I believe, and went off with another man."

"Would he come to see me?"

"Sure," replied Cairns, who lapsed into occasional Americanisms, "he's wanting a job pretty badly; I thought you might help him to one."

"Has he any profession?" asked Barker.

"He's an architect, but he has made a mess of his profession, too. *Entre nous*, my dear Barker, I lent the poor devil five pounds. He was so jolly hard up, I fancy he hadn't been having enough to eat."

"Where does he live?" asked Barker.

"I took his address down," said Cairns, taking out a small pocket-book. "Here you are, 'J. L. Stahl, 107, Liverpool Street, King's Cross.'"

Cecil Barker looked at his watch. "I'll try to see him," he said. "Good-bye, my dear fellow, expect me to-morrow afternoon."

When Cairns had gone Barker went to his table, and made a note of the address at Rickmansworth and his appointment for the following day. He then wrote down the address of the unknown J. L. Stahl, and looked again at his watch. It was a quarter past ten. He rose quickly from the table and went down-

stairs; there were three people waiting to see him. "Go up, George," he said to a man of forty or so who was sitting apart, a man with the loose mouth and dim eyes of the habitual drunkard, "I'll be with you in a moment." He turned to the other two.

"Is it anything important, Fred?" he asked.

"No, sir, not really important."

"Ah, well, come in to-morrow evening, there's a dear fellow; and, Mary, if you'll wait ten minutes, I'll come back part of the way with you. I'm going down to King's Cross."

"Very well, Vicar," agreed Mary.

When George had been scolded and prayed with, Cecil Barker washed his hands, changed his clothes, and put on a collar that in no way suggested the parson. Before going out he spent some minutes on his knees, and then, taking up a black-and-white straw hat, he joined the patiently waiting Mary.

"Now, let's hear all about it," he said; he tucked her arm into his as they walked down Acacia Avenue to take the horse tram from the High Street. . . .

As Cairns made his way in a cab to Baker Street, he burned with the glow of the expressed altruist. It had been uncommonly thoughtful of him to remember that poor weakling Stahl; very likely Barker would do the fellow a really good turn. Barker was a good chap — in his way; even if it was not quite the way of Wilfred Cairns.

CHAPTER II

SMALL FRY

1.

It was eleven o'clock when Barker came to the door of 107, Liverpool Street, but a flicker of orange yellow was apparent through the dirty glass of the semicircular fanlight; an intimation that the house was still open to visitors.

Barker made no essay of the vertical row of little brass bell-handles, labelled "Ground," "1st," "2nd," and "3rd"; his experience had taught him that the knocker was the only sure means of attracting attention. He knocked with a determination that had an immediate effect. The basement door was opened, and a small figure emerged and took stock of him from the area.

"*Now*, what d'yer want?" questioned a somewhat feeble, low-pitched voice.

Barker leaned over the rail of his bridge and peered down into the obscurity.

"Does Mr. Stahl live here?" he asked.

"O' course 'e does," replied the invisible figure.

"Can I see him? Is he up?"

"What, at this time? It's struck eleven."

"Do you think he's gone to bed?" asked Barker.

"'Ow should I know? But there, you wait a minute, I'll come up."

She came up by way of the area steps, talking continuously, and joined Barker on the stone step which bridged the moat of obscurity below. By the

light of the dim street lamp he made out the figure of a tiny woman wearing an elaborate black lace cap, with strings that hung loose on her shoulders.

"I can't say whether 'e'll be in bed," said the little woman. "I'm not a Londoner myself, and I don't 'old with the hours some of 'em keeps. But, there, we can but go up and see." She chuckled a little, as though this were something of an adventure.

"But how are we going to get in?" asked Barker.

"Oh! I've got the key," said the little woman gaily. "I couldn't come up inside without goin' through Mr. Smith's room, and he's so drunk, being Sunday, I was afraid 'e might throw his boots. Makin' such a disturbance. I'll 'ave 'im out one of these days — see if I don't," she added cheerfully.

By this time she had opened the front door, and she now turned up the gas in the passage till it flared and whistled.

"Come in and shut the door," remarked the little woman brightly, "and let's 'ave a look at you. I'm not a Londoner myself, and p'raps more careful for that reason. But my lodgers are respectable, and I don't care 'oo comes to see 'em, nor what time. One gentleman's been 'ere fourteen year — not Mr. Stahl that ain't; 'e come in May. Now what are you wanting to see *'im* for?"

"I've come from a friend of his. I'm going to find him a job," replied Barker.

"That's a good thing, then," said the little woman; "'e's lookin' for a job." She cocked her head on one side, and surveyed her visitor with a quizzical smile. "You needn't pretend you're not a clergyman," she said; "*I* know." She wagged her head with a facetious air, and then concluded: "But I'm not a Londoner myself."

"Suppose you tell me which floor Mr. Stahl lives

on?" suggested Barker. "He'll certainly be in bed if we stay here much longer."

The little woman looked suddenly aggrieved. "You wasn't in such a 'urry gettin' 'ere," she remarked, with a touch of acerbity. "But there, I'll show you," and she turned and made her way upstairs with remarkable agility. Barker followed her up to the third floor.

On the landing she paused and pointed to a line of light that showed under the door of the front room. "'E's not in bed," she whispered, with the air of a conspirator.

"Hallo!" called a voice from the inside in answer to her confidential knock.

The little woman opened the door and peered in. "You're not in bed," she remarked; "'ere's a clergyman got a job for yer. Shall I bring 'im in?"

"Good Lord!" ejaculated the voice.

"'Ere!" said the little woman to Barker, "'ere! 'E's not in bed." She stood just within the room and beckoned with a friendly air. It was evident that she meant to stage-manage the whole affair.

Cecil Barker stepped into the room.

He found Mr. Stahl struggling into his coat.

"Oh, thanks very much, Mrs. Pentecoste; you needn't wait," said Jacob Stahl.

Mrs. Pentecoste looked disappointed. "'E wasn't in such a 'urry to get 'ere," she remarked with a seeming irrelevance. Then she stood for a moment looking from one to the other with an air of genial fellowship. "Oh well, there, you needn't 'urry now," she remarked to Barker. "You can let yourself out." And with that she took a last look at her lodger, edged out of the room, and carefully closed the door.

They heard her patter downstairs.

2.

Barker's first impression of this unknown J. L. Stahl was that he looked decidedly uncomfortable.

"I'm afraid the room's in a beastly mess," said the young man. "Won't you sit down?" There was an armchair covered with American cloth by the window, and as he indicated this he flushed slightly and scrutinized it as though doubtful of its cleanliness.

"Thanks! May I smoke?" Barker was never nonplussed, but he had not quite decided as yet what line he would take with this new case of his. He judged character by intuition rather than by physiognomy, and his first summary comprised intelligence, a desire for affection that was almost feminine, and a self-depreciatory reticence. "This fellow hasn't much vice in him," was Barker's thought, and he suffered a feeling of disappointment.

"I must explain the unconventionality of the visit," he began. "A friend of yours, Cairns by name, mentioned you to me after supper. He thought I could help you."

"Awfully good of you to come so soon," said Stahl. "Cairns is a splendid chap, isn't he?"

Barker doubted the truth of this description, but he agreed warmly, and continued: "He tells me you want a job."

The young man at the table smiled sadly. "Yes, that's true enough," he said.

"You've been an architect?"

"Yes, that's no good, though."

"What sort of a job are you looking for now?"

"Anything," replied Stahl, and he ran his fingers under a litter of papers that lay on the table before him, and turned them over and scattered them.

"I've been trying to write. I don't think that's much good, either."

"Feel like Chatterton?" suggested Barker.

"Oh, Lord, no!" said Stahl, "I'm no genius. I thought perhaps I might have a chance for that reason. But I suppose, as a matter of fact, that the really good stuff always gets a chance now?"

"A fearful lot of rot gets printed," said Barker.

"Yes, it does, doesn't it?" replied Stahl eagerly. "I wonder how it is. They won't take my rot."

"How long have you been sending it in?"

"Not long. Only since May. I've got one or two things out now, short stories, but . . ." He broke off and smiled at Barker.

"You look for a precedent in the proverbial habits of chickens and curses," said Barker.

"Yes," replied Stahl, and nodded once or twice with a half-whimsical despair. "I haven't got the knack," he said. "But did you say something about a job? I've been talking a lot about myself."

Barker hesitated. This man, he thought, would be plastic material, a character to be moulded at will. Jacob Stahl, in our metaphor, was small fry, unworthy of Barker's craft, not a sizable fish. So Barker hesitated.

But though he played his own game for the joy of playing it, and though he found small pleasure in doing the thing that called for no effort, he had a fund of very human sympathy. He was sorry for this young man, whom he judged to have a certain measure of ability, yet who had fallen to the desolation of this wretched room through feebleness of purpose. A tonic was needed, and Barker decided to supply it — and to offer a helping hand at the same time. His hesitation had been but momentary.

"You've given up in two months?" he said.

"Why, my dear fellow, I have a friend who struggled for ten years before he could get a hearing."

"Oh, I know; but I haven't anything to live on," said Stahl.

"Have you tried to get a post with an architect?"

"Yes, oh yes."

"Any job? Or were you out for a fancy salary?"

"I would have taken two pounds a week."

"But not twenty-five shillings?"

"Well, I don't know. It seems rather a come down."

The corner of Barker's mouth went up, and his hand went to his cheek. "Oh, my dear fellow," he said.

"I suppose . . ." began Stahl, and stopped. He disliked parsons on principle, but the force of this man's personality had taken hold of him. "I suppose I have been rather a fool," he concluded.

"I want a secretary," said Barker, "and I'll take you for a month, if you care to try it. The salary will be five shillings a week and your keep."

"I should like it," began Stahl, "only I think you ought to know . . ."

"What?" interpolated Barker sharply.

"Well, I'm an agnostic for one thing. . . ."

"Pooh! That doesn't count," said Barker. "It's the life a man lives I value, not his creed."

Stahl smiled apologetically. "That's the other thing," he said, "I'm living apart from my wife. In fact, I don't know where she is."

"Whose fault was that?"

Stahl coloured hotly, and did not reply. The whole truth would make such a long story, and the telling of it would not be easy. Moreover, he had an instinct to defend his runaway wife.

"Faults on both sides?" prompted Barker, watching his companion keenly.

"It was my fault," said Jacob Stahl, solving his problem. "I was unfaithful to her."

"Ah! Cairns told me she went off with another man," commented Barker.

Again Stahl flushed. "That was afterwards," he said, with a frown. "Cairns didn't know."

"Who was the woman you went wrong with?" asked Barker.

Stahl looked up quickly. "Does that matter?" he said.

"It is better to be honest," returned Barker. "You can regard anything said to me as being under the seal of the confessional."

"Yes! Oh yes, I understand that," said Stahl. "If it were only my affair, I shouldn't mind. But you might, possibly, know the woman. It is just conceivable, at any rate, and, well — don't you see . . .?"

"Would you marry this woman, if your wife divorced you?" asked Barker.

"Oh yes, I would," Stahl smiled, "but she wouldn't marry me."

"Is she a bad lot?"

"No, no, I didn't mean that. . . ."

"Rather above you socially, perhaps?"

"Yes, quite so." Stahl wished that Barker would put an end to his questioning.

"I suppose you see her constantly?" continued Barker.

"No. I haven't seen her for six months."

"Nor heard from her?"

Stahl shook his head.

Barker was busy with an attempt to put two and two together, but his figures were insufficient, and his

catechumen was becoming restless. So he shifted his standpoint, and with a shrug that appeared to indicate a departure from dangerous ground, be began to speak about other things, and by degrees he came to the facts that Stahl was an orphan who had been adopted by his father's sister, and that he had lived during his early life at a little village about four miles from the town of Pelsworthy. That information suggested a possible clue to Barker. He remembered that the dazzling Lady Paignton, a woman with the worst possible reputation, also came from that part of the country. He determined to try a chance shot. He knew Madeline Paignton slightly, had tried vainly to influence her; inferentially it seemed not improbable that such a woman as Madeline Paignton now was, had had a flirtation, at least, with Jacob Stahl when she was Madeline Felmersdale, and had later taken him up again for her own amusement. Barker had a glimpse of a possible solution to his arithmetical problem.

"I suppose you knew the Felmersdales, then?" he said.

Stahl looked very hard at the papers on the table. "Only very slightly," he answered.

"Surely you must remember that beautiful creature Madeline?" persisted Barker. "She married Lord Paignton and has developed into a courtesan."

Stahl grew very hot, and manifested an absorbed interest in one of his pages of manuscript. "Yes, I think I remember hearing about it," he said. "Her marriage, I mean, of course. I should think the other thing was only scandal."

Barker dropped to his vibrant bass. "My dear fellow," he said.

"What?" said Stahl, with a look of surprise.

"Why not be honest?"

"I will be as honest as you like about my own affairs," replied Stahl; he wondered why he did not resent this curiosity about his affairs. It may have been that, secretly, he was not altogether displeased that Barker should have some idea that this failure in the garret had once been the lover of so splendid a creature as Madeline Paignton.

The examination, however, was carried no further. Barker was satisfied. "Can't you make it up with your wife?" he asked suddenly.

The young man sighed deeply. "Oh, Lord," he said, "I don't know that I could. Besides, I don't know where she is."

"She can be found," said Barker. "If she is, will you take her back?"

There was silence for a full minute. Jacob Stahl had his elbows on the table and his head in his hands. He was picturing the future as it might be if this reconciliation were made; he was trying to give an honest answer to the question. Barker watched him quietly, and lighted another cigarette.

"I don't think I could," said Stahl at last.

"But you were in the wrong."

Stahl shook his head as if he were trying to shake away his thoughts. "Do you make this a condition of my accepting your secretaryship?" he asked.

"I never make conditions," replied Barker. "When can you come? To-morrow morning before ten? I shall be out of town in the afternoon."

"It's awfully good of you," said Stahl. "Yes, I can come before ten. I don't owe anything here. Cairns lent me five pounds a few days ago."

Barker found a card, and put it on the table. "It isn't far," he said.

"I'm afraid Mrs. Pentecoste will be sorry," said

Stahl, as he bade his visitor good-bye at the street door. "She's an awfully good sort."

"I dare say I can find her another lodger," said Barker.

"Yes! Could you? I should be glad for her sake," said Stahl, "only . . ."

"Only what?" asked Barker, standing on the bridge over the abyss of area.

"Insects," replied Stahl—"large insects. That was why I was so uncomfortable when you came in."

"Oh, my dear fellow," replied Barker, giving him a friendly grip of the hand, "in my profession one comes across them every day."

"One can get used to almost anything," said Stahl, but he gave a shudder of loathing, nevertheless.

CHAPTER III

SECRETARIAL DUTIES

1.

The Vicar of St. Mark's was at breakfast when Jacob Stahl arrived at nine o'clock the next morning.

Willis made the announcement with becoming gravity; his manner seemed to imply that Mr. Stahl was intruding, and had better go away again.

"He's expecting me, I believe," said the visitor, and glanced at the luggage on the cab. For a young man at the end of his resources his luggage appeared somewhat ample.

Willis had no advice to offer. He and his wife were solely responsible for the Vicar's home comforts, and regarded their duties with a becoming seriousness. Willis was a regenerate, saved from the gutter. He was one of the Vicar's most notable successes. Since he had left the box of his four-wheeler and become a gentleman's servant, he had renounced the bottle. For nearly twenty years now he had been a total abstainer. He was a short, thick-set man, clean-shaven save for a suggestion of white whisker that came no lower than his ear, with a thick, short crop of iron-grey hair. A dogged, resolute-looking man, Willis, and it may be noted that he was permitted many liberties of speech. He disapproved of Jacob Stahl from the outset; he disapproved of all the Vicar's new protégés.

"The Vicar's at breakfast," repeated Willis.

"Well, hadn't I better get these things taken up to

my room?" suggested Stahl. "I'm coming to stay here for some time."

"Oh!" said Willis. "Wait there, and I'll see about it." He shut the door firmly in Mr. Stahl's face.

"'Is nime's Willis," observed the driver of the cab, "used to be in ahr line once."

"Did he?" said the aggrieved Jacob Stahl, waiting on the steps.

Willis returned almost immediately, but his manner had not changed. "In 'ere," he said shortly, indicating the door of a room on the right.

"But about the luggage?" suggested Jacob Stahl.

"I'll see to that."

"I haven't paid . . ."

"In 'ere," repeated Willis sternly, and Jacob was ushered without ceremony into the presence of the Vicar, who was eating his breakfast and at the same time reading the *Daily Telegraph*.

"Ah, you're punctual," remarked Barker without enthusiasm. "There's a *Daily News* there. Sit down, I shan't be very long."

It was not a very auspicious beginning, thought Jacob, and long afterwards that first impression came back to him as of the typical thing. We see more clearly the fundamental characteristics of the civilized man in the early morning, before he has slowly assumed the semblance of the character he is making for himself. Breakfast, for the town-dweller, marks the opposition of nature and culture.

When Barker put down his paper and leaned back in his chair, Jacob rushed into explanations.

"I haven't paid for my cab," he began, "but your man seemed to resent my appearance for some reason, and he almost pushed me in here. If you could find out for me . . ."

"Splendid fellow, Willis." Barker's interruption had a note of reproof. "I don't know what I should do without Willis." He rang the bell, and the invaluable servant came in and began to clear away the breakfast things.

"Did Smiler turn up last night?" asked the Vicar.

"'Bout eleven," grumbled Willis, continuing his work. "I told 'im to come back this mornin'."

"You must meet Smiler," said Barker, turning to Jacob. "He's a dear friend of mine, isn't he, Willis?"

Willis only grunted, took a survey of the room, straightened the curtains, which obscured the none too efficient window, and departed.

"Come up to my room," said Barker to Jacob. "We can start work now."

The Vicar's study was mainly table, an unusually large writing-table that occupied the centre of the room and left only a narrow channel on each side as a means of access to the two uncomfortable armchairs which faced each other by the fireplace. Yet, despite its ample surface, there was little spare room on the table, since it was covered with an orderly array of books and framed photographs, together with a fine crucifix, a large case with a folding front for stationery, and a collection of mementoes, all with an ecclesiastical tendency, presented, no doubt, by grateful parishioners — a wide description, for London was Barker's parish.

"We'll say a few words before we begin," said Barker, and dropped suddenly to his knees. Jacob was unprepared, but followed suit, wondering whether his employer had forgotten that admission of agnosticism.

It became instantly apparent that he had not.

Barker prayed in a very straightforward manly

way, without resort to that undue adulation of the Deity which the Christian religion has preserved from its Eastern ancestry. He did not beg for favours so much as make suggestions, and the suggestions in this case were for the welfare of our dear brother Stahl, that he might live not for himself, but for others, and so come to recognize the power of the Divine purpose and achieve a humility which should teach him the littleness of his small arrogance in the denial of the Great Ruler. The prayer finished with a suggestion that Mrs. Stahl might be found and reconciled to her husband, and that she also might learn the same lessons of altruism and humility.

The impression left upon Jacob Stahl was that he had much to learn as to the real purpose and meaning of life.

After the prayer the Vicar got to work. There were between thirty and forty unopened letters lying on his blotting-pad, and he proceeded to deal with them rapidly. Two or three he put in his pocket without reading them, a few he dropped into the wastepaper basket, the others remained to be answered.

As Barker sorted, he occasionally handed a letter over to Jacob with some comment, such as "What do you make of that?" or "What shall we say to this fellow?" but he did not seem to expect an answer. By the time Jacob had mastered the purport of the letter, often a work of considerable difficulty, the Vicar had another poser ready for him.

"Now," said the Vicar, after he had skimmed his morning's post, "just make notes of what I want to say, and then you can go downstairs and write the replies."

"Here, these," he handed over half a dozen letters, "are subscriptions to the 'Antol' fund; acknowledge

them and say something pretty. I'll give you a book to enter them in."

"How shall I address these people?" asked Jacob, looking over the packet. "Clara Fawley, for instance — is she a Miss or a Mrs.? I see she writes to you as 'Dear Cecil.'"

"That's Lady Fawley, good-hearted woman, but no stamina," commented Barker. "You ought to know her, she's a friend of your Madeline Paignton."

"Oh Lord!" breathed Jacob. "But oughtn't you just to go through these with me and tell me whom they are from?"

"Doesn't matter in the least," said Barker. "My last secretary couldn't spell any word of more than three letters. They'll understand. These you can answer as you like." He handed another packet across. "You can tell Blinker that he's no damned good. That's Blinker, the one without the stamp. And these I'll just give you a few notes for. Have you got a pencil? There's one on the table."

The Vicar proceeded to intimate in the fewest possible words the nature of his reply to each of the remaining letters, while Jacob hurriedly scrawled brief notes on any blank space of the letter itself. Many of Barker's answers had a whimsical turn, and his new secretary was uncertain whether the intention was to be taken seriously. There was, for example, a letter of several sheets, and every sheet crossed, a perfect maze of illegibility, to which Barker's reply was: "Tell that dear old fool, Miss Gaythorne, that I haven't had time to read a word of her letter, but if she'll write what she wants to say on one side of a sheet of notepaper I'll attend to it."

"Am I to take that literally?" asked the perplexed Jacob.

"Oh, read the letter if you can," said Barker. "It's not of the least importance."

Before the last of the letters was disposed of, Willis entered the study and announced: "Smiler's 'ere agen."

"Send him up, will you?" said Barker. "We've just finished."

Willis did not send Smiler up, he conducted him, suspiciously.

In this, Jacob was inclined to applaud Willis's methods, for Smiler turned out to be the most disreputable-looking of loafers; he was of the type that can be found lying asleep in the Parks during the spring, summer, and autumn; in winter they stand more, for the sake of warmth.

"Well, Smiler, get drunk last night?" asked the Vicar genially, when Willis had gone out and shut the door after him.

Smiler grinned foolishly.

"You know you're a bloody fool, don't you, Smiler?" continued the Vicar pleasantly.

Smiler's grin grew a little wider.

"Sit down and take that awful grin off your face," said the Vicar, pointing to a chair by the door. "I'll take the skin off you in a minute or two."

The Vicar continued to dictate the gist of his replies to the last few letters, while Smiler sat patiently waiting to be skinned.

"You'll find ink and everything downstairs," said the Vicar in conclusion. "Now go and be busy, there's a dear fellow, while I kick this ass by the door."

Jacob remembered that there was a book in which certain subscriptions had to be entered.

"Make a note of 'em on a piece of paper now," replied the Vicar. "Oh, by the way, don't leave any

money lying about. Smiler would have it in a flash if he got half a chance, wouldn't you, you gutter rat?"

Smiler grinned.

2.

Jacob Stahl did not like his job. He only liked doing the things he could do well, and he realized at once his inability to achieve in his present task. He did not know how to address these people. He would have liked to write to each of them a capable letter that should fitly represent the character of the Vicar, but he had not the knowledge that would enable him so to write. And he understood quite well that he was not expected to refer to his employer for further information. He had been told that the last secretary could not spell; that was his precedent. In effect his directions were "Go ahead! never mind the minutiæ," and they were directions he disliked.

He began with Lady Fawley's note. She had enclosed five pounds for the "Antol" fund, and hoped to be "down on Sunday evening."

Now, did the Vicar call her Clara? She called him "Dear Cecil." Oh no, there must be a stereotype for all these letters. How should it go? "The Rev. Cecil Barker begs to thank Lady Fawley for her kind subscription to the Antol fund, and is glad that she hopes to be down on Sunday night." He took a sheet of notepaper, and wrote the formula carefully. "Oh, rotten!" he remarked aloud to the empty room.

The trouble was that he was conscious of his own part in the writing of the letter. He wanted it to represent himself. He pictured the receipt of the letter, and he grew hot at the thought that the recipient might smile at the manner of his phraseology. This

Lady Fawley was probably coming to Camden Town next Sunday evening. He would be introduced to her as the Vicar's new secretary, and he would then be associated with the letter.

He tore up his first attempt and began again. He wanted to be more colloquial and yet sufficiently formal, and for this reason he discarded the description of his employer as the Rev. Cecil Barker, and substituted The Vicar. He knew that he was a Vicar; many of the letters began "Dear Vicar." So far he was satisfied.

His next step was to conceive a different machinery, to advertise his own part in the performance, and by so doing to show that the Vicar had no hand in the phraseology. He began again:

"DEAR MADAM,

"The Vicar has asked me to thank you for your kind contribution to the Antol fund, and to say that he hopes you will be able to come to service on Sunday evening."

At this point he paused again to consider the style of the subscription. He did not want to sign his name, and wondered if it would be rude to put merely his initials. A happy solution occurred to him. He could call himself "the secretary." When he had added this he regarded the letter with a faint satisfaction.

There had been sounds of traffic in the passage and overhead for some time, but he had disregarded them. Now the Vicar himself came into the room, carrying his straw hat.

"Anything for me to sign?" he asked, looking at his watch.

"Oh! Do you want to sign them?" said Jacob,

realizing that his formula would not end appropriately with Mr. Barker's signature.

"Just as well to let 'em see that I've had some hand in the production," replied the Vicar, coming to the table; "where are they?"

Jacob grew hot. He found that he had been an hour over his one brief effusion. "It's rather difficult . . ." he began.

The Vicar pursed his mouth. "My dear old chap," he said. "I don't want to work you too hard, but you've got about thirty letters there, and if you take an hour over each of them I'm afraid you won't get much sleep."

"It was only the first," expostulated Jacob; "I couldn't get a decent formula."

Cecil Barker sat down opposite to his new secretary, and looked keenly at him. "I wonder none of those stories were accepted," he said.

Jacob blushed; he was not sure whether the Vicar was satirical. "I don't quite see . . ." he said.

"So much artistry in composing a letter," replied Barker, and he took the letter in question and read it. "Whom is it addressed to?" he asked.

"Lady Fawley."

The Vicar stroked his chin. "Snob?" he asked suddenly.

"N-no, I hope not," replied Jacob, but he was afraid the description was not wholly untrue.

"Why begin with this?" asked the Vicar.

"It was a kind of test letter," said Jacob.

"We must have a long talk together, old chap." Barker's clear blue eyes lighted up, and he smiled that wonderful, fascinating smile of his. Jacob Stahl felt at that moment that he could worship this man.

"I have to go down to Rickmansworth this after-

noon," continued Barker, "and I shall be busy to-morrow, but we'll have a long talk over things one day this week, eh?" He rose and rested one hand on Jacob's shoulder; he still wore that look of kindly, forbearing love; his face was illuminated with the glow of the mystic.

"When you have time," said Jacob Stahl humbly. "I'll get these letters done by the time you come back."

The letters were done by half-past four, and then Jacob took a horse-tram to Hampstead, and later, from a bench on the Heath, he watched the sun fall behind the dim hills.

There was a feeling of peace and great resolution in his mind. He was thinking of Cecil Barker as a latter-day saint, using the methods of his time; he thought of him as a wonderful example for smaller men.

"Renunciation, self-sacrifice, a life lived for others," murmured Jacob Stahl—"that is the only satisfaction, the only thing that gives a meaning to life."

As he journeyed back through the hot streets he looked with new eyes at the crowd of self-centred men and women, the crowd of small aims and no aspirations. "It is not that one can do them much good," he thought; "it is what one gains in the doing."

As he turned into Acacia Avenue, his mind was busy with his own personal problem. "I must find Lola," he thought; "I must make her see things in the same light. The Vicar will help me."

Lola was Jacob Stahl's wife.

3.

That mood had held and inspired Jacob Stahl on more than one occasion in the course of his thirty years of life.

As a youth he had had moments of mental exaltation, rapture; moments when he had been uplifted in thought, full of great purpose, ambitious to lead a life of inhuman purity. These upliftings were never marred by any sudden and violent reaction; he declined gradually to his average condition of mind, his representative outlook. From an ideal of self-sacrifice which he attempted to embody in practical life, he slowly relapsed to his habitual attitude of comparative selfishness, the relapse being marked by efforts at recovery which never reached the original height of fine resolve. A psychologist might have charted these moods in a curve which would have had some such configuration as the contour of a range of rolling hills decreasing in height till they merged imperceptibly into the plain. But the genesis of the curve was always steep, practically vertical; these moods arose with startling suddenness; there were no signs to mark their approach.

The stimulus which had induced these periods of exaltation had, in Jacob Stahl's youth, been attributable mainly to a religious cause — to some sermon that had held his attention, to a chance realization of some ethic in the New Testament, or even to the reading of some happily conceived book that made a purely secular application of the pious ideal. These things had made appeal on occasion to some quality of spiritual pride that was innate in him.

As he grew up these moods had become less frequent, yet their individual force had increased rather

than abated. One peak that towered above the rest marked the change in his cosmogony; marked also his first realization that these moods were not directly attributable to the generous interference of some proselytizing omniscient, who took a personal and private interest in the spiritual welfare of some 1,500 million other individuals on this supposedly unique planet of the solar system. This peak was perhaps the most notable landmark in his mental landscape; indeed, the plateau at the foot of the range it had begotten, the plateau to which he had finally descended, maintained an average above sea-level consistently higher than that of his original plain. He had since regarded that plain, not without some justification, as a level to be despised.

The truth of the matter is, doubtless, that when Jacob Stahl had relinquished the religion in which he had been educated, he had been forced to exert powers of thought and imagination which had earlier been almost inert. He had been faced with a problem of endless perplexity, which must be solved from data so diverse, intricate, and relative that the longest life of the wisest man was obviously insufficient to master all the detail.

It was not intellectual pride that had led Jacob Stahl to attempt the impossible. Whatever his egotism in some directions, he had small opinion of his own mental abilities. There are two sources of consolation for the independent inquirer into the problem of whence and whither, and these consolations sustained his courage in the hopeless attempt to discover universal truth. The first is that some small part of the detail which supplies the data has been investigated and collated by the finest intellects, and though it is difficult in most cases to adopt any premiss without denying the premiss of another and, possibly,

equally profound school, yet in these matters the independent holding himself unprejudiced, may make a choice, and say, "I have no doubt"; he may plump for, say, the theory of organic evolution on general lines, as being supported by better evidence than the theory of special creation. That satisfies his personal need, and this satisfaction figures the second consolation. For in this high endeavour it is not necessary so much to unravel the intricacies of the whole problem as to discover some answer which will satisfy this personal need. The careless are content with the formula which has been taught to them in youth, and any formula which is not too glaringly inconsistent with the facts of life will serve equally well. Evidential objections may be attributed to lack of faith. The anxious and inquisitive, those who look for an expression of purpose, and those who have a radical feeling for the relevance of cause and effect, must satisfy their personal need by independent inquiry.

Somewhere in this last category may be placed Jacob Stahl. In his youth he had accepted the formula with careless indifference, but he had been attentive to the experiences of life, and one by one the axioms of his faith had been discovered false in some application. Still, whilst he had learned to doubt the universal applicability of his ethic, he had, from lack of inducement, failed to question the theory of its origin, until one day a chance conversation had insinuated the doubt whether the truth of his creed was proved beyond all suspicion.

That was some years ago, and the immediacy of his affairs and the intimacy of his troubles had often intervened between Jacob Stahl and the solution of his problem. But three months before Cecil Barker had found him in Liverpool Street a dramatic

change had come into Jacob Stahl's life. During those months he had never risen to any great height of exaltation, but he had once more set himself to discover a meaning in life.

And now — he realized causes, even as he walked in mental glory, uplifted above the crowd that thronged the High Street of Camden Town — now he was once more suffering the elation of rapture, regardant of the beauty of self-sacrifice; and the instrument of his uplifting had been the precept and pattern of a man who wore the livery of the Church which Jacob Stahl had rejected. That contradiction was unanalyzable in his condition of exaltation. He did not attempt to analyze it; he accepted it. He saw himself as a creature of fine discrimination and broad outlook, in that he could so admire a man who belonged to a Church Jacob despised. That thought was included in his all-embracing altruism. His mind was shot with a brilliant thread of universal love. He could encompass the heights on which was enthroned a glorified self, or realize the abasement of self-negation. He was for the moment a glorious, wordless poet.

How hardly may we call any man hypocrite!

4.

Cecil Barker did not return to "63" till nearly ten o'clock. He had found other occupation since his visit to Rickmansworth, but he did not appear tired or enervated. He came in cheerfully, with a smile of welcome for his secretary, such a smile as might hallow the greeting of long and dearly-loved friends. He came over and laid a hand affectionately on Jacob's shoulder. "Come up to my room, old chap," he said. "What about those letters?"

Jacob produced them from a drawer in the writing-table, and followed the Vicar upstairs.

There was an interval of over an hour, however, before they came to conversation. Jacob's letters had to be signed, and then the Vicar wrote several more on his own account. While the Vicar wrote Jacob sat patiently, doing nothing. He had not been invited to smoke, and he saw no book at hand that he cared to read. He could not even watch Cecil Barker, who was hidden by the accumulation of things on his table. So Jacob, having no instructions, sat as patiently as he could, and thought, but his thoughts no longer ran a glorious torrent, as they had run an hour or two before. He had now to exercise his imagination deliberately, to construct where he had seemed to witness.

At last came the sound of a vigorous sealing and stamping. "Ah!" breathed the Vicar with relief.

"Can I help?" asked Jacob, and the Vicar passed him a double handful of letters to seal. He himself was using a little glass roller that revolved in water, but Jacob had to use his tongue.

"I'll stamp them," said the Vicar, when Jacob had performed his task. "Now you may take them to the pillar-box, and be rid of the beastly things."

"Which way is it?" asked Jacob, still a willing servant.

"Just at the end of the street," replied the Vicar, and pointed the direction. "I shall be downstairs when you come in," he added; "we'll have a smoke before going to bed."

Jacob was curiously pleased at the thought of a quiet, intimate conversation with the Vicar. As he hurried to the pillar-box with his burden of letters, his mind ran forward with a leap of pleasure. Surely this man's knowledge of life must be won-

derful; Jacob Stahl looked forward to a more intimate acquaintance with him, as to the reading of a masterpiece. . . .

The Vicar had changed his coat and put on slippers. On the table was a syphon of lemonade, two glasses, and a box of cigarettes. Jacob accepted a gesture of invitation, and helped himself to lemonade, but he smoked his own cigarettes. He preferred his own Virginians to the Vicar's Egyptians.

For a moment there was silence, and then Jacob asked: "How's Cairns?" It was an effort to start the longed-for conversation.

"A depressing theory of life, Cairns's, eh?" said Barker.

"Oh, do you think so?" Jacob was startled. Cairns was one of the people who had taught him to think. Jacob had a sturdy admiration for Cairns and for Cairns's theory of life.

"That poor little girl of his," continued the Vicar —"a dear, intelligent child, brought up to believe that she must live her own life — brought up to believe in a creed of self, in other words . . . with the inevitable result." The Vicar shrugged his shoulders, and threw away a half-smoked cigarette. He smoked quite a number of cigarettes in the course of the day, but he never appeared to enjoy them.

"I've never met Miss Cairns," returned Jacob; "I haven't heard. . . ."

"She wants to go and live with a married man more than twice her age," said the Vicar. "Horrible, isn't it?"

"But surely Cairns doesn't approve of that?"

The Vicar clicked his tongue. "Approve? Of course, he doesn't approve, but he can't or won't see that he's responsible. He talks a lot of damned nonsense to the girl about living her own life, and

the conventions of morality having no meaning, and then he cuts up rough when the girl takes him at his word."

"I suppose she hasn't quite understood the principle . . ." began Jacob, but the Vicar interrupted him.

"Principle!" he broke in, "what do you suppose an emotional, hysterical fellow like Cairns understands of principles? His own foundations are in the loosest sand; do you suppose he's capable of teaching his daughter to build?"

Jacob frowned. "But Cairns is an awfully good chap, really," he said. "He's been very decent to me."

"Emotion, emotion," replied Barker; "he finds a pleasure in giving the thing that costs him nothing. He doesn't do it for the love of the person to whom he gives. He lent or gave you five pounds a few days ago; he told me about it when he asked me to come and see you. I imagine he would always advertise his charities. When I asked after you, he volunteered the information that you were no good; 'no grit' was another of his descriptions of his friend Mr. Stahl."

Jacob blushed hotly. He was hurt, but he could not change his opinion of Cairns so quickly. "I'm afraid it was rather a true description," he said.

"Pooh!" replied the Vicar, "you've twice the grit that Cairns has."

"I'm afraid not," replied Jacob, but he was flattered. He immensely admired the qualities that are implied by the word "grit."

"Oh, have some confidence in yourself," said Barker. "Don't compare yourself with a weakling like Cairns."

Jacob made no reply; he was trying to make ap-

plication of this advice. This afternoon it had seemed to him an admirable thing to have no opinion of one's own capacities. There was silence for a minute or two while Jacob grappled with this problem; at last he said: "And Miss Cairns? Have you convinced her?"

"She's a dear girl," replied the Vicar; "she's coming to supper on Sunday."

Evidently Freda Cairns promised to be one of the Vicar's successes. She was mentioned by name in the prayer with which Barker suddenly closed the conversation.— Jacob had hastily to discard a newly-lighted cigarette. . . .

Jacob had much material for reflection that night in his little attic — small, but scrupulously clean, and he thanked Heaven that he need take no precautions against midnight invaders,— but he was asleep in five minutes, and the material had to stand over for another opportunity. The strange thing about such material is that when it is reconsidered after a night's rest, it wears an entirely new aspect.

5.

Jacob Stahl found plenty of occupation during the five days that preceded Sunday. That first day of the week, by courtesy, though most people mentally reckon it as the last — and if it is a day of rest it seems more fitting that it should come at the end rather than at the beginning of labour — bulked large in the diary of anyone connected with 63, Acacia Avenue. Not that Cecil Barker was a Sabbatarian; he was genially broadminded with regard to the question of Sunday occupations, but the day was so sharply differentiated in the matter of habits and customs from the other six. By Wednesday

Jacob was conscious of the coming of Sunday. He felt like a man walking in a series of fields of similar character, who sees ahead a Saturday field that first initiates a mild slope upwards, and beyond a very cliff that must be climbed and got over before he returns to his wandering.

Jacob had disliked Sundays in his youth, but during his term of office life, the day had suffered a change in his estimation. It had become a real day of rest and relaxation, a holiday to be anticipated with delight. Now, instinctively, he returned to his earlier habit. He began to dread Sunday.

Would he be expected to go to church? The Vicar had made no further reference to Jacob's agnosticism; he seemed to take it for granted that Jacob had sloughed that evil garment, that it had been scraped clean away in the act of entering the doorway of "63." The very doorposts of this house possessed virtue.

Jacob had time for reflection on Saturday night; time for a review of the week. The Vicar was in his study, presumably writing sermons, though he had not advertised the purpose of his retirement, and the secretary, with no special task to perform, had leisure for his review. Even the junior curate was occupied.

The senior curate was hardly known as yet to Jacob Stahl; he was the Vicar's vicar, a preoccupied man of between fifty and sixty, clean-shaven and grey-haired, who bore the responsibility of the parish of St. Mark's. Barker's parish, it should be remembered, was not circumscribed by any recognizable boundary. . . .

The junior curate took his duties less seriously. He was one of Barker's "cases." The junior curate was an extra, nearly always a case of some kind, and

the present holder of the title was another "drink-cure," one of the Vicar's specialties; his name was Owen Woodhouse, a drab-complexioned man of thirty-five or so, with rather handsome eyes and a carefully tended moustache. He dropped in at "63" on Tuesday morning about eleven o'clock, and made his way into the dining-room.

"You the new secretary?" he asked.

Jacob was busy with the morning's letters. "Yes," he said, "I am. Do you want to see the Vicar? He's got someone with him at the moment, but . . ."

"Oh no," replied Woodhouse, seating himself in the armchair. "I just looked in to see if I could help you. I'm the junior curate, y'know."

"Oh, how d'you do?" responded Jacob, with a smile of greeting. "It's awfully good of you to offer to help me. I hardly know the ropes yet."

"Beastly job, isn't it?" commented Woodhouse. "I've been doing it for a fortnight. Last secretary came from Pentonville."

"Gaol?" questioned Jacob.

"Mm!" assented Woodhouse. "He left us suddenly with ten bobs' worth of stamps and a silver cigarette-box. Barker never gave him a chance with the Antol fund stuff, or he'd have had that, too."

"I say," said Jacob, "what *is* the 'Antol' fund?"

"Drink-cure," replied Mr. Woodhouse. "Have you got a cigarette on you?" When the cigarette had been supplied and lighted, he continued: "'Breviation for anti-alcohol, y'know. I've had it."

"Eh?" said Jacob in astonishment.

Mr. Woodhouse nodded. "I'm one of the successes," he said. "I've had D.T.'s twice. Hereditary, y'know."

"And are you — er — quite cured?" asked Jacob with deep interest.

"Course, one never knows," replied Woodhouse airily. "But I've been teetotal now for four months. Beastly hole this, isn't it?"

"What? Camden Town?"

"The whole show," replied Woodhouse. "I suppose I shall have to stick it a bit longer, though; period of probation sort of thing. Barker's keeping an eye on me."

"Isn't he a splendid chap?" Jacob's face glowed with enthusiasm as he asked the question.

"Barker? Oh yes. Took no end of trouble over me. D'you know where he keeps his cigarettes? I'm not very keen on Americans."

"I'm afraid I don't," said Jacob, looking round the room. "They were here last night."

Mr. Woodhouse went on a tour of discovery, and presently found some of the Vicar's cigarettes in the back room, which was separated from the front only by two looped curtains that had replaced folding-doors. When he returned he was in a communicative mood, and recounted much of his family history to Jacob.

The letters were not proceeded with till the Vicar came down. "Oh, Woodhouse, come up to my room, there's a good chap," said Barker.

"Just been giving the new secretary a few tips," replied the junior curate, as he rose to obey the invitation.

Jacob failed to remember the "tips" as he returned to his secretarial duties. "Funny sort of chap," was his summary of the impression left by Woodhouse.

That first visit was only one of many. Woodhouse was always "just looking in." He became rather a

nuisance; there was no getting rid of him till the Vicar came. Jacob had to learn to answer letters and appear to listen to the accounts of the junior curate's exploits at the same time. . . .

The review of Jacob's week contained other matters of interest besides the confession of Mr. Woodhouse. On four occasions the secretary had been sent with notes or messages to members of the elect in society, and one of these messages had been to no less a person than Alethea, Duchess of Wiltshire.

That was Jacob's third errand of this kind, and he had already noted that Cecil Barker's messengers were treated with a certain suspicion. One never knew whether they were not fresh from Pentonville.

The message in this instance was a verbal one, and had to be delivered in person, and Jacob had been shown into a plainly-furnished waiting-room off the hall to await Her Grace's pleasure. He was wearing a serge suit and a straw hat, hardly the dress for a ceremonial call in Berkeley Square at four o'clock in the afternoon.

As he waited he was inwardly resentful of his position, nor did Alethea, Dowager Duchess of Wiltshire, make things easier for him.

She was a tall, handsome, voluminous person of sixty, with a great deal of white hair, and she made no attempt to put Jacob at ease. "You have a message from Mr. Barker?" she said, standing in the doorway.

"Yes," said Jacob. He was uncertain whether he ought to have added "Your Grace" in his position, but he decided to omit that formality. "Yes, Mr. Barker wishes to know whether you could possibly change the date of the bazaar to the 23rd of October. He had a wire from — from someone, I don't know

who it was, this afternoon, and he sent me to you at once."

"How vague he is!" said the Duchess, addressing the furniture. "Will you say I'll write to him, or — no, ask him to write to me. I may forget."

That was all; she turned and left the room without any further recognition of Jacob's presence. He waited a moment to allow her to disappear, and then made for the front door, but he was confronted by a superior servant of some sort in a tail-coat, butler or house-steward, he supposed, who said that Her Grace was sending him a glass of wine — not would he like a glass of wine?

"Oh no, thanks," replied Jacob hurriedly, and made good his escape.

"What snobs these people are!" commented the Vicar when he was informed of the Duchess's answer. "Just write to her for me, will you?" He dictated:

"DEAR ALETHEA,

"I have had to change the date of the Bazaar from the 21st to the 23rd of October. I hope this will make no difference to you. The cause is too great a one to allow any small personal differences to influence us.

"Yours,

"CECIL."

"I wonder what Her Grace will make of that!" thought Jacob with some glee. . . .

Once Jacob had been with the Vicar to Pentonville, that well-stocked water where good fish were always abundant, where every cast meant a specimen. The Vicar, it seemed, was a personal friend of the chaplain's; he was also on terms of intimacy with all the

officials, and in touch with every society that existed for the benefit of prisoners. He was a privileged person at the prison, and could doubtless have taken Jacob with him into the unimaginable fastnesses where the criminals lurked; but Barker, conscious of his privileges, took no liberties with his concessions. He was far too much in earnest.

So Jacob had waited at the entrance, and had listened to the praise of the Vicar from the mouth of an elderly policeman. "'E's a good un, if ever there was one," was the essence of the policeman's verdict. Jacob agreed whole-heartedly. . . .

Among other minor diversions of the week had been a committee meeting in connection with the Antol fund, at which Jacob had played the part of secretary, reporter, and accountant; three times he had taken a class at the night-school, and on two evenings he had canvassed some of the better-class parishioners of St. Mark's for subscriptions to the Church Restoration Fund. "Restoration," he had learnt, was a euphemism for "extension," or "new furniture," or "further decoration," or all three combined; synonyms which were made particularly clear to him when he called at a wrong house by accident, and found himself engaged by an ardent Baptist. Jacob had stood his ground fairly well, he thought; he had not argued, but he had put in a good word on behalf of the Vicar. "It doesn't matter what sect you belong to," he had said, "you must admit that Mr. Barker spends all his life in the service of others."

"I've heard other tales of him," had been the Baptist's reply, but he had appeared mollified.

All these activities had been sprung upon Jacob without a moment's notice. He was learning to obey without question, to take an order and find out for

himself afterwards what the order implied. Also he was learning what the life of self-sacrifice connoted.

On the whole he felt satisfied with his week's work. He was seeing many new aspects of life, and so far he had not found any job that he had not tackled fairly successfully. If he had any doubt it was as to his influence with the boys at the night-school.

"It is life and experience," was his summary, "but I wonder what I shall have to do to-morrow."

His practical altruism had had no effect of stimulating his desire for church services; nor had he as yet seen any reason to change his opinion as to the special creation theory.

It is to be noted that the long talk with the Vicar had not yet been realized.

CHAPTER IV

SUNDAY

1.

Willis came into Jacob's room at half-past six with a small jug of hot water.

"'Oly Sacrament's at seven," remarked Willis austerely, "breakfast at height."

The announcement was Willis's method of "givin' a nint." Jacob had come to no decision overnight, and before he had quite decided what to do this morning, he fell asleep again. He woke an hour later under the impression that he still had time to get to church, but his watch undeceived him. He went down to breakfast, resolved to renew his profession of agnosticism if any reference was made to his absence.

The Vicar did not allude to his secretary's absence from early service, but Jacob fancied that Willis wore a look of disapprobation more marked than ever, and Willis had disapproved of Jacob Stahl from his first entrance into the house. Jacob had tried in vain to conciliate Willis, but he was susceptible neither to bribes nor flattery. In his heart Jacob excepted Willis when he tried to regard all men as brothers. This morning Willis was designated, mentally, as a "surly brute."

The Vicar hardly spoke at breakfast. He was wearing a cassock for the first time in Jacob's experience, and some association he could not trace suggested the word "Jesuit" to Jacob's mind. He

made no application of the designation; he felt subdued this morning, a little nervous. The silence oppressed him; he wondered if he were in disgrace.

His doubts were resolved after breakfast. The Vicar rose hurriedly. "I shall be away all day," he said; "I am preaching at St. Botolph's, Kensington, this morning. But you'll come in for the sermon at St. Mark's this evening. I think that will interest you."

"Oh yes, of course," assented Jacob. "And you have nothing for me to do to-day?"

"Go into the country and think about others," said Barker with a smile. "Willis will pay you your week's salary before you go." He smiled again, and patted Jacob affectionately on the shoulder.

Jacob was enormously gratified.

Willis, when he came to clear away the breakfast, laid a sovereign on the table.

"I'm afraid I've no change," said Jacob.

"The Vicar said nothin' about wanting change," grunted Willis.

Jacob pocketed the sovereign, but he felt a little uneasy. He thought there must be some mistake. He decided that he would not spend more than the quarter he believed to be his just due. He still had a few shillings of his own.

He took the prescription offered to him; literally so far as the first ingredient was concerned. He made his way to Baker Street, and took train to Harrow. It was a beautiful day, and he dawdled out to Sudbury, where he had lunch at a public-house, and afterwards walked slowly back to Wembley Park. He had been lame for the first fifteen years of his life, and though there was little now to show that he was not as other men, he was not able to indulge in long walks without suffering later.

The second half of the Vicar's injunction was not perhaps obeyed in quite the sense intended. It is true that Jacob did set himself at first to contemplate the problem of existence from Cecil Barker's point of view, that he attempted a mental realization of the embracing altruism which works without thought of reward, but his mind refused to dwell upon the set task. After many relapses into more alluring fields of thought, into the contemplation of ideas which arose spontaneously and were peculiarly attractive to dally with, Jacob allowed the Vicar's lesson to slip away from him. He did think of "others," but of others in some relation to himself that he knew was not the kind of relation implied by the original injunction. Yet his thoughts were not all tinged with an element of self-glorification. For quite an hour he fell into a detached analysis of the quality of genius, and mentally phrased an article on that engaging theme. Also he devoted some time to the consideration of practical Socialism, and this thesis also he occasionally cast into words.

"I believe I could write," he thought, as he journeyed back in the train to Baker Street. "The trouble is that I have no special knowledge of any subject — except architecture!" He found that he had no ambition to write an essay on architecture.

2.

Cecil Barker preached a remarkably good sermon at St. Mark's that evening.

Jacob found himself a seat, comfortably near the pulpit, a few minutes before the one little bell ceased its finicking clatter. He thought he was going to be disappointed, for the senior curate took the service, and there was no sign of the Vicar. When the con-

gregation stood up to sing the hymn before the sermon, Jacob was inclined to go out, and nervousness alone prevented him from indulging the inclination. For once his nervousness stood him in good stead, for half way through the first verse of the hymn the Vicar entered, knelt for a minute in the vacant stall on the decani side of the choir, and then ascended the pulpit.

He took for his text St. James ii. 8: "If ye fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well."

"I was passing Buckingham Palace a few weeks ago," began Barker, "and saw a crowd collected round the gates. I joined them, and listened to what some of them were saying. It appeared that the Queen was expected to drive out. There were two women just in front of me chattering, and I heard one say to the other: 'I do love to get a sight of royalty.' I asked her just what she meant by 'royalty,' and she told me she meant 'Kings and Queens.' I suppose most of you here mean Kings and Queens when you speak of royalty, and that is why I want you to consider for a moment what St. James meant when he spoke of this '*royal* law.'"

Still in a vein that was half colloquial, Barker entered on an explanation of the various gradations of law. He spoke of the law of the home, the rules ordained by the father and mother of a family; then of the rules of a club, the rules by which all members of the club agree to abide. From smaller applications he rose to a consideration of the laws ordained by Parliaments or autocrats, and passed for a moment to illustrate that these ordinances were in one sense "royal laws"; that they overruled the little laws made in the home, the club, the parish, or the county; that if by any chance the smaller law entailed any

contradiction of the greater, the smaller must be revoked or altered. When this point had been made he returned to his definition of a royal law which he now showed to be one which overruled all others. "I have spoken of a country," he said, "as the greatest unit which is ordinarily presented to us in this connection; there are, however, international laws, agreed to by Prime Ministers, Presidents, Kings, Queens, and Emperors, which have a still wider predominance. But when St. James speaks of a "royal law," he makes a wider sweep still. The King he refers to is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and his law was framed without distinction of nations; it is applicable to every human being now living in the whole world, and it was ordained to override every law framed by human agency, so that when the lesser law contradicted the greater, the lesser should be revoked or altered."

He returned to his opening anecdote, and asked whether the woman he had spoken to, by the Palace, fully appreciated the "royal law of the Scriptures," and to make his point he read the following verse of the epistle: "But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors." "Do you find that a hard saying?" he asked. "Do you think that because we are enjoined to have no 'respect to persons' we must become democrats and Socialists?" He explained that what was intended was that this greater law recognized no differences between individuals; that it was not a law for rich *or* poor, king *or* pauper, but for everyone alike, and that when a queen was adored for her queenship, and not because she was a fellow-creature, we were convinced of the law as transgressors. He elaborated this point with many instances, and denounced without restraint the attitude of flatterers

and sycophants, and then, with a sudden application of his theme, he said, with blunt emphasis: "You are all sycophants; snobs, every one of you. There is no sacrifice you wouldn't make if some sprig of royalty invited you to his house, but you would not walk across the street to help John Jones, your neighbour. You break the royal law every day of your lives a dozen times a day. You think it might be easy to love the Queen of England as yourself, but what about the poor devil who snatched your watch in the High Road because he was starving? Do you feel that you can love him as yourself?" He returned to the royal invitation, and pointed out that such a one was generally spoken of as a command, but that the great royal invitation of the Scripture was ignored.

At this point he changed his tone, and, bending over the pulpit, he spoke in a more confidential voice. "Rotten things, laws, aren't they?" he asked. "Always new laws being made and old ones altered; the poor layman doesn't know what he may do and what he mayn't, half the time. There is that awful law they call a 'Budget,' which takes money out of your pocket, and spends it on keeping up armies and navies, and providing prisons for those who haven't got any money, and other dreadful things like that. I wonder the people of England don't get up and say: 'Look here, we've had enough of these laws; leave us alone for a bit, and see how we'll get on without 'em.' I suppose we should make a pretty nice mess of it." The Vicar smiled his whimsical smile, and the congregation responded automatically. From his point of vantage the Vicar looked down on a congregation with smiling faces. "That makes you smile, doesn't it?" he said. "Only you know that if we could just keep that one royal law of St. James, if we could all of us love our neighbours as ourselves,

there would be no need for any other law; there would be no need for Socialism any more than for Kings and Queens and Parliaments; there would be no need for armies and navies, or prisons or taxes. What a happy place this world might be if we could substitute that one royal law for all the others."

He returned to his former manner, and drove his point home. He emphasized the feebleness of criticizing governments and social evils, when the fault lay always with his hearers and their own manner of life. He wound up with an appeal — that was also a denunciation — to begin at once to obey the greatest law in all the world, to put it into practice so that others might have the benefit of example, and finished with a peroration on the happiness which comes from self-sacrifice.

Jacob had not been able wholly to avoid the troubles of the echo during the louder passages, but he was immensely impressed. As he walked the two hundred yards that separated the church from Acacia Avenue, he was firmly resolved to begin the instant regeneration of the world in his own person.

3.

The two little rooms at "63" were overcrowded that evening. The big table in the larger room could not provide accommodation for all the guests, and Willis, looking harassed and somewhat ill-tempered, was forced to rig up a makeshift table in the smaller room for the overflow.

Cairns was there with his daughter, a rather thickset young woman of nineteen, with pretty hair and a full, well-modelled chin. Jacob rather admired her. Knowing nothing of Holland, he decided that she reminded him of a Dutch type. The thought flashed

through his mind that if he had not been married he would have liked to cultivate Miss Cairns's further acquaintance, but he at once put these frivolities away from him, and deliberately restrained himself from looking at the young woman.

He spoke to Cairns for a moment or two while they were awaiting the completion of the supper arrangements. Cairns was not very effusive. He asked Jacob how he liked his new job, but did not appear to be listening to Jacob's warm eulogies of his employer.

"Oh, Barker's all right," said Cairns, watching his daughter. "Capital sermon he gave us, only you miss half his points in the beastly church. Well, see you after supper, old chap."

"Good. Yes," rejoined Jacob as Cairns moved away. Jacob was thinking of what Cairns had said about him; he was conscious that Cairns had been hardly loyal, was perhaps a little too anxious to please the person he addressed. But these thoughts, also, Jacob suppressed; they were not consonant with that ideal of universal brotherhood. After all Cairns was a good fellow; he had splendid qualities.

"Will you sit 'ere?" said Willis in Jacob's ear; he indicated the rickety-leaved writing-table in the smaller room; "you and Mr. Woodhouse, and the two Mr. Boyles."

"Oh, all right," replied Jacob a little testily, and then smiled by way of amendment. He must certainly begin with Willis in his scheme of general approval. Willis was quite a difficult person to love; he ignored both the indication of temper and the forgiving smile. Willis had his work to do.

The Vicar had not arrived yet, and Fred Boyle had temporarily taken his place at the head of the table. The sirloin of cold beef was being vigorously carved, and plates distributed round the table without

regard to the sex or taste of the recipients, most of whom were still standing against the wall or by the fireplace.

"Would you sit down, please?" remarked Willis curtly to the company in general, and he turned up two chairs on each side of the seat to be occupied by the Vicar, in order to indicate that any chairs but these might be used.

The guests managed to find places for themselves with some little difficulty; they were, however, very quiet. There was little conversation between them. Only Fred Boyle was trying determinedly to encourage cheerfulness, punctuating his onslaughts on the beef by comments on the habits of sirloins, delivered in a voice that was evidently intended for the company at large.

"Beastly squash!" remarked Mr. Woodhouse to Jacob. "We shall get what's left."

"But we 'ave the luxury of more space as compensation," remarked old Mr. Boyle, and made an explanatory gesture which knocked down a fork.

"Yes, I'd sooner be in here out of the crowd," assented Jacob cheerfully. "Let me pick that up for you." Old Boyle was an easy subject; his optimism appealed to Jacob.

Woodhouse sneered, and Jacob found himself thinking that the Vicar's sermon had had little effect on the junior curate, who should surely have taken the practical application to heart. "Rather a poor sort of creature, Woodhouse," thought Jacob, and then remembered that this, too, was a brother. It was really very difficult.

"Here's the Vicar," announced Fred Boyle in a loud voice, as the front door was heard to slam. "I'll vacate. Everyone helped?"

"A few more down here," replied Woodhouse

audibly. But Fred had made good his escape. He looked very hot but still cheerful as he joined the little group in the smaller room.

There was a sound of voices in the passage, called a "hall," and two women entered, followed by the Vicar.

The first woman was Lady Paignton.

4.

Jacob's heart leaped suddenly, and his breath choked him. He was conscious that his face was aflame.

Madeline Paignton had been his first love.* She had been a schoolgirl of seventeen then, but he had believed that she loved him. He had had good reason; she had withheld nothing. They had loved without restraint. He had had no cause to doubt her till one fateful Sunday afternoon, when he had dared to face her father and beg for a formal engagement. Then everything had fallen about his ears. His belief in her, his own respect, his feeble ambitions. She had been brutal; she had given him up apparently without a qualm of shame or regret. He had told her then that he hated and loathed her. He had hesitated on the verge of some horrible word in his description of her. That had been the end of his first love affair with Madeline Felmersdale; but he had met her again when she had become Lady Paignton, and when he himself was also married. That madness had been brief; he had known that so preposterous an affair could never last, but she enthralled him. She was irresistible. He knew she was a light woman, that she was subject for the contempt of

* See "The Early History of Jacob Stahl."

decent people, but how could such a person as Jacob Stahl, so self-depreciatory, of such humble parentage, so full of admiration for the beautiful in woman, resist this wonderful creature with her glorious flaming hair, her perfect skin, her magnificent abounding vitality.

To-night as he watched her move to the head of the table he suspected that if she condescended to notice him once again he would be at her feet.

5.

"By Jove, who's that?" murmured Woodhouse to Fred.

"Never seen her before," replied Fred, and then, glancing at his father, he whispered something to Woodhouse which Jacob could not catch.

Woodhouse replied with a leering wink, and he and Fred smiled knowingly.

Jacob's blush did not subside; he was hot and indignant. Boyle and Woodhouse! Good Lord!

"You look hot," remarked Fred.

"It is frightfully hot," replied Jacob.

"Every window open," replied Fred, looking round. "Don't see how we can do anything more."

Willis brought them beef at last. It was a distraction, and Jacob, as he pretended to eat, found opportunity to glance at Madeline. She was on the Vicar's right, and appeared to be indulging in a lively flirtation with him. There was little conversation going on, and Jacob could catch a word or two now and again, above the clatter of knives and forks and crockery. Once he heard the Vicar say, "Oh, but, my dear Lady Paignton, that would never do," and he heard and saw Madeline laugh. It was just

the same schoolgirl laugh he had known nine years ago.

At that moment Jacob did not love Cecil Barker. "He's just the same to everybody," thought Jacob, with a double twinge of jealousy, one for Barker and one for Madeline.

He was distracted by Fred, who was in a buoyant mood. "That's a good-looking woman," remarked Fred.

"Which?" asked Jacob crossly.

"Well, there's only one in it to-night," replied Fred. He lowered his voice, and added: "The one with red hair up by the Vicar. Do you know who it is?"

"Yes," said Jacob; "would you mind passing the salt?"

"Sly dog! Means to keep it all to himself," put in Woodhouse.

Even old Boyle chuckled, and Jacob found himself opposed by three antagonists; he had hoped for support from old Boyle.

"I'm not supposed to give away the contents of the Vicar's letters," said Jacob sulkily.

"Oh, rot!" returned Woodhouse. "It isn't a question of that. She isn't here incog., is she?"

"I don't know," replied Jacob.

He was thinking what a triumph it would be if Madeline saw him, took special notice of him. That could easily be contrived. They had not parted on bad terms. She might not wish to renew their old relationship; it was inconceivable that she would ever belong to him again, still there was no reason why she should not address him as an old friend. He looked across at her again, tried to catch her eye.

"I say, old man, don't stare at her so," said Woodhouse.

"Oh, go to hell!" muttered Jacob. The effect of the sermon had quite evaporated. Jacob hated Woodhouse and Fred viciously, and he could have slapped old Boyle's face with great pleasure when that rather shocked gentleman (he was a sidesman, and had a reputation to maintain) remonstrated with a dignified "Hush, hush! young man!"

"Well, I meant it," returned Jacob, addressing Boyle. "I think it's perfectly beastly the way you all three snigger because there's a pretty woman in the room." He paused a moment, and then added: "Especially after the Vicar's sermon."

Old Boyle was genuinely shocked and offended now, but before he had time to answer, Woodhouse, who was not at all disturbed, said: "Well, the sermon was about love, wasn't it? Seems to have had more effect upon us than you."

"Not that sort of love," retorted Jacob, wishing he could find the right words, and bungling hopelessly.

"What sort?" asked Woodhouse, with simulated surprise. As he bent across the table, Jacob felt sure that Woodhouse exhaled a faint smell of whisky, partly disguised by the scent of cachous.

Possibly Woodhouse noted some change in the expression of his *vis-à-vis*, a look of suspicion or surprise, for he leaned back quickly in his chair, and then repeated half sulkily: "Well, you needn't preach, anyway, you've had your eyes on her most of the time."

The atmosphere had changed. Old Boyle applied himself to his plate, and Fred, who, dull as he was, had perhaps sensed something of Jacob's suspicion, lapsed into a stolid silence. So far as the little party in the smaller room was concerned conversation was at an end.

Jacob felt uncomfortable and miserable. Uncomfortable because he had made an enemy of Woodhouse, a man he did not trust; miserable because he realized that he had so soon lost the glow of the high resolve which had animated him after the sermon. "No grit," Cairns had said. Probably Cairns was right. It was such a hopeless task to pretend to love such people as Woodhouse, yet the Vicar appeared to do it.

Jacob glanced again at the Vicar, and then hastily dropped his eyes lest the others should think he was looking at Madeline; but even that hasty glance had shown him that Barker was still very much engaged in his conversation with the bewildering Countess of Paignton.

Jacob sighed, and half unconsciously shrugged his shoulders. He was wondering how deep was Barker's profession of altruism.

The tedious meal dragged on. Willis had left the room when the first course had been cleared, and Fred was delegated by his father and Woodhouse to fetch what remained of the rice pudding and stewed fruit for the overflow party.

"I don't want any," said Jacob, and as there was barely enough pudding for three, no one pressed him to change his mind. He felt that he was a pariah, sent to Coventry for having rebelled against the conventions of his fellow school-boys. He had done it all in one phrase; he had offended Woodhouse and Fred by an assumption of a superior attitude; old Boyle by using the wrong words. Jacob still felt that his attitude had been right, but he knew that he had expressed it in an altogether wrong way. He was angry with himself for his futility, and with circumstance for making him self-conscious. "All very well for me to talk," was his thought, "but I'm worse

than they are. How can I come the high and mighty business?" Yet there was one item of consolation for his self-respect; he had not bragged as he might have done — that at least was to his credit.

Cigarettes were being lighted in the next room, so Jacob also began to smoke, though the other three at his table were still discussing the remains of the pudding.

"I hate the smell of smoke while I'm eating, don't you?" muttered Woodhouse, addressing Fred Boyle.

Fred grinned and winked.

Jacob assumed an attitude of complete detachment, and stared out through the French window at the little strip of grass behind the house.

Woodhouse grunted something about "no manners." Jacob had certainly made an enemy of Woodhouse.

A general movement and scraping of chairs in the larger room recalled Jacob from a contemplation of his resentment. Lady Fawley had risen, and was making her way towards the door. The Vicar, following her, paused to whisper something to Miss Cairns, touched Cairns on the shoulder, and, arrived in the comparatively open ground between the two rooms, turned to Jacob.

"Go and talk to Lady Paignton," said Barker. "She's been trying to catch your eye for the last ten minutes." He paused and looked at Jacob with a twisted smile. "Can I trust you?" he asked.

"I think so," said Jacob. He was already on his feet. As he walked up the room, squeezing his way behind the chairs of the people at the table, he saw that Madeline had turned round to greet him. He was conscious that Woodhouse and Fred Boyle were looking after him, that he was suddenly become in some sense a hero. The one item to his credit was

gone now. Well, brag had been thrust upon him. It was fate. He would go through with it.

6.

Madeline greeted him with effusion. She even held his hand longer than was necessary. She paid no regard to the attention she was exciting among the guests of the supper party. Everyone was looking at her and Jacob, yet she greeted him and spoke to him as if they were secluded in some quiet corner of the grounds at Elmover where he had first made love to her.

"My dear Jimmy," she said, "what on earth are you doing down here?"

"I'm working with the Vicar at present," replied Jacob.

She was looking at him with friendly criticism. "Seems to have made you thinner," she remarked, "and older. Have you turned serious? I love that old Vicar of yours; he's no end of a sport."

Jacob, the cynosure, sitting in the Vicar's seat designed to command a view of the whole table, was conscious of a dozen listeners, while his companion was conscious of only one. He groaned inwardly. Was he expected by the many to act as Cecil Barker's vicar? How could he refute that description "no end of a sport" and that "old Vicar"? Jacob had never thought of Barker as an old man.

"Oh, the Vicar's splendid," was all he found to say.

Madeline beamed on him and nodded. "What have you been doing with yourself all this time?" she asked. "Why didn't you write?"

Jacob set his lips, and looked towards the door as if he were meditating escape. He caught the eyes

of Fred Boyle and Woodhouse fixed upon him. They had turned their chairs, and were regarding him and Madeline as if they were there for the special amusement of the whole party. The attitude of those two was typical of that of the majority. Only Cairns and his daughter were talking to each other.

"I — I didn't know you expected me to write," said Jacob.

"Well," replied Madeline, "you are ——" She made no attempt to complete the sentence. That was final. It was quite plain that it conveyed everything.

"Am I?" said Jacob.

"I say, how long will Clara be up there with your old Vicar?" asked Madeline, with a sudden change of subject.

"Oh, I don't know. Half an hour, perhaps," answered Jacob.

"Good Lord! What do they do up there?" asked Madeline, and a faint titter ran round the table. Lady Paignton had already won her spurs in that company as "a bit of a character."

"Talk!" replied Jacob. He hesitated, and then, with a sudden plunge, added: "And pray, too, sometimes."

Madeline passed that by, as she passed everything which did not suit her mood. "Oh, well, I'm not going to wait half an hour," she said. "Come and see me home!" She was a creature of action; she got up as she spoke, and pushed her chair away.

"Oh, but," protested Jacob, rising also, "you'd better wait a few minutes, hadn't you? Lady Fawley won't know what's become of you."

"Delighted to give her a message," put in Cairns, who was standing aside to let Lady Paignton pass.

"Thanks, would you?" replied Madeline.

"Any excuses you wish me to proffer?" asked Cairns, in the manner of one who would be delighted to lie in such a service.

"No, just say I've gone," returned Madeline. "Come on, Jimmy."

In the passage Jacob protested. "I *can't* come," he said, "I can't, really."

"Bosh!" replied Madeline; "I want to know what you've been doing all this time, and why you never wrote."

"But . . ." began Jacob.

She bent a little towards him, and looked him full in the eyes. Jacob forgot that Willis might be lurking in the background. "You are a devil, Maidie," he said.

"Can we get a cab?" she asked.

"Not here; we may find one in the High Street," he answered.

As the door closed behind them he gave a sigh. He could hear Barker's voice through the open window on the first floor. Barker had said: "Can I trust you?" "No!" should have been the answer. Madeline put her arm through his.

"Fancy living in this awful place!" she said. "I say, what have you done with that dried-up wife of yours?"

"We are separated," replied Jacob.

"So are Arthur and I — practically," said Madeline. "Of course, we stay at the same houses and all that sort of thing. I expect it's only temporary," she added. "Arthur's away just now."

Jacob made no reply. He was struggling. "I have to make the fight now," was his thought; "I mustn't dream of being strong afterwards. I must fight now."

They found a four-wheeler in the High Street.

"Berkeley Square," said Madeline, and gave the number.

"You won't want me any more now," said Jacob, when she had taken her seat in the cab.

"Oh, you *are* rotten to-night, Jimmy," replied Madeline petulantly. "You owe me an explanation. You haven't told me why you never wrote."

"What was there to write about? I knew you didn't want me any more," he replied.

"Look here," said Madeline, "I want to tell you something. I want to explain about you and me."

"Explain?" asked Jacob. He could not imagine Madeline the imperious, the autocrat, making explanations.

"Yes. *Please*," she said. He could not resist the intonation of that second word.

"I'll come to Berkeley Square," he said, "but I won't come in."

It was a strange explanation. She sat very close to him in the cab, and she told him that she knew how badly she had behaved to him in the past. "And I shall again, very likely," she went on. "I'm like that, I know; you must make allowances. But really and truly, Jimmy, I'm fonder of you than I've ever been of anyone. You believe that, don't you?"

Jacob was thrilling at the admission. Here was all the allurement of the flesh, and with it all the allurement of romance. He remembered how in his youth he had worshipped her as a wonderful being, remote from his world. He remembered how she had always been a romance for him; the realization of all impossible dreams. Yet he resisted.

"But it's so impossible," he said.

"Why?" she asked.

"Oh, think of it. I haven't a penny in the world. . . ." He was going on to say more, to

draw a contrast between his position and hers, but she interrupted him.

"Oh, money's nothing," she said. "I've heaps of money."

"Yes, I know," he replied. "That's just the trouble; if you were poor. . . ."

"Let's go shares," she laughed, but he realized that she intended her offer.

"No, thanks," he replied shortly.

"Oh, well, what difference does the money make?" she asked. "We can meet somewhere. We . . ."

"We can't, Maidie; you must see that we can't."

"Do you mean that you don't care any more?"

"No, I don't mean that. I — no one could resist you, but . . ."

"You are resisting me."

There was a pause. The cab had crossed the Marylebone Road; they were already in the precincts of the wealthy.

"Jimmy, dear, I want you," said Madeline, and put her arm round his neck. He let his face touch hers. The perfume of her was like a drug that blurred his intelligence, while it stimulated his senses. He vaguely remembered that he had promised Barker to find Lola and live with her again.

"Jimmy!" repeated Madeline.

The cab stopped. The doors of the house in Berkeley Square opened magically; a footman appeared on the threshold and came down the steps to open the door of the cab.

"Won't you come in?" asked Madeline. "My sister Nina, you know, is staying with me. She would like to meet you again."

"Thanks, no, I can't come in," replied Jacob.

"You're not coming?" asked Madeline. She was

standing at the door of the cab. Jacob had not moved.

"No," said Jacob—"no, I'm not!" He was tempted to smooth his reply; he had to exercise strong self-control to prevent the addition of the feeble "I can't, really, I can't."

"Oh, very well." She was piqued now. She turned from him without saying good-night, and ran up the steps into the house.

"Where shall I tell the cabman to drive to, sir?" asked the footman.

"To — oh, tell him to drive back to where I hailed him," said Jacob. He could not say "Camden High Street" to that gorgeous flunkey.

He had won; a barren victory it was to prove in some ways, but it was his. Why he had refused he did not know.

7.

He attempted to analyze his reasons as he was jolted back towards the slums and weariness of Camden Town. Two moods were fighting for the possession of him. One a fierce reaction against the restraints of his position, against the ideals of Cecil Barker, and against all that restraint and ideal connoted; the tedious greyness of life, the irritation that resulted from continued efforts at self-control, the endeavour to regard such men as Fred Boyle, Willis, and Woodhouse with at least affection. As he jogged north towards Oxford Street this mood was uppermost. He regarded the life at Acacia Avenue as he had once regarded the life of his office in the country town of Pelsworthy. In both cases his point of view, his criterion was the same, inspired by his familiarity with Madeline. Her father's place at

Elmover had seemed magnificent to him in his youth, as her husband's house in Berkeley Square seemed glorious now. These places were the homes of the elect, who could and did despise such as he was, who could never be taught to admire the humble ideal of self-sacrifice. It was well enough for Barker. He was one of their own kind; he did not lose caste by his work. But Jacob Stahl could never hope to receive recognition in that great world unless he were lifted up by the lovely and all-powerful Countess of Paignton. And he could never hope to see her, talk to her, be with her unless he were so upraised. . . .

He hesitated on the exact nature of his desires in regard to Madeline. What more did he want? Did he want everything? Curiously, no. She was an ideal of beauty, and she had been his. He did not desire repossession in the old sense. His senses had stirred when her face had touched his, but even in that moment he had revolted against the thought of profaning the ideal. He was ashamed to remember old, permitted liberties. He grew hot in his lonely recollection of them, and fidgeted to drive away his memories. "Oh, damn!" he said aloud, and shook his head. He realized that he was not quite the same man he had been six months ago, or he was the same with something added, some young growth was thrusting upwards from the old neglected stock that had always been rooted within him. The contemplation of this miracle gave space for the other mood that had been eagerly seeking an entry.

He had crossed Oxford Street when the cab stopped, and the driver, descending from his box, appeared at the window.

"'Aven't got such a thing as a bit o' string, I suppose," said the driver. "One o' my tugs is broke."

"Tugs?" asked Jacob; he had an idea that the man referred to his braces.

"Ay! 'arness, y'know," explained the driver.

"Oh no! I'm afraid I haven't got any string," said Jacob. "Where are we?"

"Mort'mer Street; I dessay I can manage," replied the driver.

"Oh, look here, I'll get out now," said Jacob. "I can get a tram from the Hampstead Road."

"Please yourself," replied the driver. "My mews is close 'ere. I shan't be sorry to get 'ome."

"How much is it?" asked Jacob.

"Well, I've come a goodish way," replied the driver thoughtfully. "Shall we say six shillings?"

It made an inroad on the sovereign he had received that morning, but Jacob paid without challenging the amount.

"Thank you, sir; good-night," said the driver.

"Good-night," replied Jacob warmly. "Not a bad old chap," he thought, as he made his way east past the Middlesex Hospital.

As he walked, the second mood took possession of him. He reflected that he had won a victory over himself and his desires, a victory that had been planned. It was a step, and he took credit for having taken it. It was true that when one attempted to analyze it, there did not seem to have been any desperate and prolonged struggle. Something within himself had risen up and said "No" at the critical moment. That something was perhaps subjective, but it evidently responded to encouragement. During the past week he had been stimulating that new growth, and it had responded nobly at a moral climax. He would continue to encourage it, with the Vicar's assistance. Vigorously for a week, and intermittently for some months, he had been fighting the

fleshly lust, and the flesh had accepted the mental suggestion. He had not overwhelmingly desired Madeline; his desire had not been strong enough to override his nervousness. That was physical, no doubt; but it was the result of right thinking. What one thought, that one became. . . .

By the time he reached the Hampstead Road he was full of resolve again; already he was despising the standards of Berkeley Square.

It had been a glorious July day, and the tram terminus was thronged. Jacob had great difficulty in getting a seat. Twice he stood aside to give place to women or old people. He was living the life of self-sacrifice. When at last he gained standing-room on the top of a tram, it was nearly twelve o'clock, but he was happy in his new-found self-confidence; he had no thought of the time.

The Vicar himself let Jacob in, when he at last arrived at "63."

The Vicar's mouth was twisted on one side. "Oh, my dear fellow," he said.

Jacob's heart sank suddenly; he had forgotten the fact that he would certainly receive admonishment.

"May I explain?" he said.

Cecil Barker led the way into the sitting-room — the supper arrangements had been cleared away — and his expression was not one of encouragement.

"I — I didn't go in," said Jacob lamely.

The Vicar looked at his watch. "Did you walk back?" he asked.

"Part of the way. I couldn't get a tram at once. They were so full."

"Rather a bad beginning," said the Vicar, ignoring the excuse.

"Oh, but really," protested Jacob, "I — I — that is — nothing happened, you know." It was so diffi-

cult to avoid the suggestion that he was guilty — he had gone all the way to Berkeley Square with Madeline, and he had practically kissed her in the cab.

"Whose virtue was that due to?" asked the Vicar.

It was an unfair question. Impossible for Jacob to say "She tempted me fiercely and I resisted"; it was disloyal to Madeline, but, worse still, it was to make a brag of his virtue to the Vicar at the expense of a woman. Jacob had little doubt how Barker would regard such a breach of the honourable convention.

"I'm not going to see her again," said Jacob, evading the question.

Barker's face expressed disapproval, and he had a face that was capable of expressing his emotions very clearly.

"I'm afraid you're most pitifully weak, Stahl," he said, "unable to resist the least temptation. Such a little trial and such a fall."

"I didn't fall," said Jacob.

"Not in fact, perhaps, but in all else. There is no difference. It is the attitude towards these things that counts, not the deed. Fear will often keep you from the actual commission — fear or nervousness, as no doubt it kept you to-night. What I dislike is that you could not remain five minutes in the presence of that prostitute"— Jacob caught his breath at the word —"without wanting to go off alone with her."

Jacob would have given much to refute the applicability of that horrible word. He could not doubt that it was used deliberately, brutally, in order to cover the very shadow of a boast. That word lowered the whole episode from art to realism, from high romance to the level of a report of the police proceedings. It killed the glory of his refusal, and

put him on a level with Fred Boyle. It explained his self-control in the matter of the last detail. Useless to profess that he was peculiarly favoured, that Madeline had declared an astounding preference for his love. That was to boast again by arduous methods; to court another, a more caustic criticism, no less realistic than the first. It was plainly futile and banal to brag that he was not as the others. There was the sting of Barker's word. How many others had there been? how many might there not still be? Where was the pride of achievement? Perhaps Fred Boyle might have been favoured.

Thus was Jacob's glorious victory shown to have been an ignominious defeat. Very difficult of attainment was this ideal of living for others. Peculiarly so, inasmuch as Barker himself could dare any criticism while the convicted sensualist was subject for severest censure if he raised his eyes to appraise the lines of a woman's figure.

"I've nothing more to say," said Jacob at last.

The Vicar had much more, and he said it in a prayer wherein he suggested to some dim unreality whom Jacob still conceived as a white-bearded patriarch, that this poor weak creature Stahl should receive strength.

It had been a very full Sunday, and the outcome of it all was that Jacob, reflecting on that unfair interview with the Vicar, decided that he must take immediate steps to find his missing wife. This was an act of repentance.

He was not yet disillusioned as to Cecil Barker's admirability. The Vicar was still a wonderful pattern of admirable strength and strangely splendid qualities, but he had lost something of his godhead. He had been unjust. It is a failing one always criticizes in a god.

CHAPTER V

BARKER *v.* MURGATROYD

1.

In likely country (say the Roman Catacombs) the game of hide-and-seek is consumedly wearying for those who seek, and when there is no appalling penalty attached to one's discovery it can be no less tedious to the sought. In romances which describe this enthralling business of hiding, the penalty for discovery is commonly death — or worse, as the romancers say, when the refugee is a woman. Such an incitement to our interest saves us from dulness, and we know that there is always that inevitable clue lying in the least likely position — relics of the refugee's apparel, perhaps leaving a trail like a paper-chase. Nevertheless we know well enough that that fortunately rare phenomenon, the intelligent criminal, can and does escape with all the bloodhounds of the law at his heels; we know that even if he has a morbid taste for murder and dismemberment, he can not only escape once, but can return a score of times and still leave no trail. And this when the whole country is roused, and the resources of State wealth are at our disposal. Picture, then, the hopelessness of seeking by private effort any disappeared person who has not offended the State law, and who is not desirous of being found. Picture the hopelessness of Jacob Stahl's efforts to find his wife.

How was one to start? By advertisement? An orthodox and well-favoured method, no doubt, but one

that could hardly prosper if there were no inducements to offer; and who could suppose that Mrs. Stahl would be moved to return to a penniless husband on the grounds that all would be forgotten and forgiven; the very phrase involves a psychological absurdity, no matter to which act the precedence is given. This takes no account of the cost of advertising — in so good a cause Barker might produce funds from some mysterious source — but, putting that aside, to whom could one address the advertisement? Jacob, pondering these things, shrank from using his name. A hundred paragraphs might escape the eye of the person to whom they were addressed, but they would inevitably be seen by some acquaintance among the many. One cannot advertise for a lost wife without acquainting the world with the fact that one has lost her. Jacob dismissed the means of advertisement as too cumbrous for his private purpose.

There remained personal inquiry. His thoughts turned to the house in Bloomsbury Square, which he had occupied during his three years of married life; occupied now by a tenant who had taken the place furnished. That house was so full of associations of Lola that, imaginatively, Jacob fancied it must provide some clue — what, he did not pause to consider. It would be a beginning.

He approached Barker with this promise of reform after the morning's letters had been answered. Monday was always a heavy day — so many people remembered Cecil Barker on a Sunday, and wrote to him.

The Vicar looked keenly and suspiciously at his secretary,— he was always a little too suspicious in his psychology, the one fault of his genius in this direction — when Jacob made the announcement of his intended wife-hunt.

"How are you going to set about it?" he asked.

"I thought of going up to our old house in Bloomsbury Square," replied Jacob.

"What good would that do?" asked Barker.

Confronted with the necessity for an explanation of detail, Jacob saw that his proposal savoured of inanity. He stammered. "I — the truth is, I hardly know how to begin. I don't think advertisement is any use. I thought it all out this morning."

"Hadn't she any intimate friends?" asked Barker.

"I didn't think of that," replied Jacob. "Let me see, there was one. A Miss Feltham —'Deb' she was always called. She . . ."

"Would your wife have been likely to write to Miss Feltham?"

"She might." Jacob did not resent the interruption of his explanation. He had learnt that the Vicar had a feeling for essentials.

"Do you know her address?"

"I think she lived with her people, somewhere in St. John's Wood. The road had an odd name, not English."

"Woronzow?" suggested the Vicar at a venture.

"Yes. By Jove, I believe it was," said Jacob. "Do you know her?"

The Vicar shook his head. "Only a guess from your description," he answered.

"I suppose I can find the number," mused Jacob.

The Vicar indicated the Post Office directory.

"You're extraordinarily unpractical in many ways, Stahl," he said. "If you would dream less and keep your eyes open a little wider, you might do some good even now. Look *out* instead of *in!*"

Jacob understood from this that he was forgiven for last night's emprise. What he did not under-

stand was that he would have aroused a much deeper interest had he been more whole-hearted in sin. The mediocre, the easily penitent, the reluctant or fearful sinner, had no attraction for Barker. He loved his own like — the gambler, the desperate, the extremist in vice or virtue. He believed that he could mould the personality of Jacob Stahl as wax. Cecil Barker, with all his brilliant gifts, not least of them his gift of insight, did not discover that Jacob Stahl was not wax, but rubber. He could be impressed momentarily, and in time he hardened, but in essentials he was less easy to model than granite. Granite may be broken with a hammer.

2.

Deborah Feltham was one of those dear, faithful, tenacious women who remain beautifully blind to all the failings of their ideal. Deb had admired Lola Wilmot, and though she had suffered jealous pangs and exhibited signs of disapproval when Lola Wilmot had definitely announced her intention of becoming Lola Stahl, Deb had returned to her allegiance when opportunity had offered, when she could safely say: "My dear, I always told you it would be a failure, but you wouldn't listen." Deb had said that once very definitely and clearly. Lola had looked stricken and penitent. After that there were no more reproaches. "You poor dear!" was the new form of address adopted by Deb, and Lola had accepted the suggestion. She had worn a chastened air.

When Deb received the intimation that "a Mr. Stahl" was in the drawing-room, and would like to see her, she braced up her pince-nez and did what she could in the way of setting her lips. Nature had

endowed her with outstanding incisors in her upper teeth; she could look vicious, but never resolute.

She looked vicious now. Her temper had been tried by the heat in the office — the offices of the Women's Co-operative Bureau were severely restricted — and long suffering as she was in some ways, she easily developed a superficial tartness which betrayed the original excess of acidity. To come home after a bad day, to expect tea and no worse trial than the accustomed vagaries of a capricious mother; instead, to find herself confronted with the villainous husband of her dearly-loved friend — this was to test for acid with delicate reagents.

The curt entry and distant acknowledgment of her visitor's presence were superogatory. Jacob understood the portent of those bared incisors as of something pertinaciously though not dangerously vicious. He saw her as a malignant rabbit, an animal that can be scared into submission, but does not respond to caresses.

"What do you want?" asked Deb ungraciously, and Jacob watched the blood creep into the two white depressions on her underlip as she spoke.

They were both standing, and Jacob understood that he was expected to come to the point without hesitation. "I want to find Lola," he said. The use of the Christian name was an effort at ingratiation. Jacob could never illtreat a rabbit.

"What for? Haven't you made her unhappy enough yet?" Deb's slightly protuberant eyes could not flash, but they were amazingly contemptuous.

"There were faults on both sides," said Jacob.

"I begged her not to marry you," said Deb. "I always knew she was mistaken in you. But she was so emotional. It was a terrible mistake from be-

ginning to end. Why can't you leave her alone now she *is* happy?"

"Is she happy?" asked Jacob.

"Yes," said Deb, and set her teeth afresh in that illtreated and over-modest underlip.

"I — I want to begin all over again," protested Jacob.

Deb snorted. "Nice look-out for poor Lola," was her comment.

Jacob looked pained, and murmured that Miss Feltham did not give him "credit for much," but he left it doubtful what noun the adjective was to qualify.

Deb filled the lacuna at her own pleasure. "I give you credit for a great deal," she said. "You could never make Lola happy. You have never understood her."

Jacob wilted. This was the echo of Lola's own complaint. It brought the past too vividly before him. The thought of the old struggle revived the memory of his own attitude. He began to test his own capacities. Had he ever understood Lola? Hadn't he been to blame — even in the first instance before Madeline had reappeared? Was he this and that? Weak and incapable, for instance, too feeble an idol for any woman to respect?

"You know where she is?" he ventured at last, without having found an answer to any of his questions.

"She's with Mrs. Murgatroyd," snapped Deb. "Lola has given up her life to the service of others."

Jacob started. What a curious unanimity! Perhaps Lola and he were too much alike; husband and wife must complete each other; they must not compete. "Curious," he hesitated, "that is what I am *trying* to do. I'm working with a man in Camden

Town; Cecil Barker. I don't know if you've heard of him?"

"Oh yes. I know him by name very well," said Deb.

"It was Mr. Barker who said that I ought to find Lola, that we ought to live together again."

"I supposed you'd never have suggested it yourself," snapped Deb.

Jacob looked pained again. "I think you are rather unjust," he said.

"I'm very sorry for Lola," was Deb's retort.

"What is Mrs. Murgatroyd's address?" asked Jacob, with a hint of temper in his voice. He had been very patient so far, but he had reached his limit.

"Everyone knows Mrs. Murgatroyd," replied Deb, and left the room suddenly. She had been standing near the door, and was glad she could leave so abruptly, with a snub as the last contribution to the conversation. Jacob's change of attitude had intimidated her, and she realized too late that she had been a fool to mention Mrs. Murgatroyd.

As Jacob let himself out of the little two-storied house, he also had it in his heart to wish that Deb had not made that lapse. It was not true that everyone knew Mrs. Murgatroyd; *he* did not, but certainly the Vicar would. And he was pledged to an interview, at least, with Lola, who would probably be backed by this difficult patroness of hers. He wondered if Mrs. Murgatroyd had received full confession of Lola's early vagaries.

3.

The Vicar knew Mrs. Murgatroyd very well. It appeared that she was a kind of female Barker for

the parish of South London; that she was frequently in correspondence with the Vicar, and that they occasionally exchanged "cases." They were united by the similarity of their attitudes towards the C. O. S., an organization which they used when it suited their convenience, but whose methods they criticized unsparingly. Barker had once converted a branch secretary, and had made her relinquish her connection with the Society.

The Vicar had not taken much interest in Jacob's case after the first day or two of his secretaryship; an occasional prayer had been the limit of Barker's effort, save that brief rebuke of Sunday night. He woke up to a new interest when he heard that Lola Stahl had been adopted by Mrs. Murgatroyd. "I'll go and see her," said the Vicar.

The interview between the two powers was a momentous one. There had never been a perfect unanimity between these two forces, and on this occasion a breach was opened which lasted for ten years.

Mrs. Murgatroyd was a woman of fifty at this time. She had a husband living, but she had not heard from him for fifteen years, and was quite uncertain as to his whereabouts. He had begun by being merely lazy, and considered that when he had married a fortune of between eight and ten thousand a year all need for further effort was at an end. He had soon found disillusionment. His wife had a personality and a genius for persistent endeavour. After ten years, during which time he had declined from laziness to secret vices, Dick Murgatroyd had decided that he preferred poverty and freedom. He had run away, and his wife had never divorced him; her excuse was that she wished to save any other woman from becoming Dick's wife.

In her methods, Mrs. Murgatroyd was more

evangelist than Cecil Barker. She favoured an elaborate ritual for its attractive powers, and if she failed to influence many "cases" which would have yielded to Barker's methods, she had the advantage that her cures were, on the average, more permanent. One sees that her net was not thrown with so wide a sweep as was that of the Vicar; its mesh was noticeably finer.

She greeted Cecil Barker with warmth.

"What sort of a woman is Lola Stahl?" put in the Vicar suddenly, when they had exchanged a few notes on minor cases.

Mrs. Murgatroyd drew herself up. "What do you know about her?" she asked.

"Her husband is my secretary at present."

"What an extraordinary coincidence!" murmured Mrs. Murgatroyd.

"Coincidence?" questioned Barker.

"Yes," replied Mrs. Murgatroyd firmly. She had no intention of being involved in any metaphysical discussion.

"You haven't answered my question," continued Barker.

"What sort of woman?" repeated Mrs. Murgatroyd. "Well, emotional, highly-strung, vain of her power over men, and eager for admiration on any count from her own sex. She has remarkable powers of self-deception, and under my influence I believe those powers can be exercised for good. She is, at the present moment, intensely *dévote;* I believe she will remain *dévote.* Physically she is not strong."

"Would she return to her husband?" asked the Vicar.

"I shouldn't permit her to do so," returned Mrs. Murgatroyd.

"Oh, my dear lady!" said Barker, dropping to his

vibrant bass. The phrase was a perfect counterpart of his "Oh, my dear fellow!"

"I should not permit it," repeated Mrs. Murgatroyd.

"You don't know what a dear good fellow this Stahl is," said Barker. "Weak, but no vices. He has been working so thoroughly earnestly with me for the past ten days. A sterling character. Believe me, these two must come together again."

"Your description hardly coincides with the one I have received," said Mrs. Murgatroyd. "I understand that he was criminally lazy, to say nothing of the fact that he went off with another woman."

"Was his wife so faithful?" asked Barker.

"Until after her husband's desertion. She left the man she was living with — his name was Reade — to come and work with me."

"And Stahl, since he has been with me, has resisted the renewed solicitations of Madeline Paignton, that exquisitely beautiful courtesan. You know her, of course?"

Mrs. Murgatroyd nodded. "Nevertheless, I cannot reconcile your account of the man with Lola's," she said.

"Those wonderful powers of self-deception have served to make her story convincing," suggested Barker.

"I believe her in this particular," replied Mrs. Murgatroyd. "Her story is too circumstantial for an invention. She has told me much."

"She has altered the significance of her facts," said Barker, "the most subtle and convincing form of untruth."

"You'd better see her for yourself," said Mrs. Murgatroyd, and rang the little bell on her writing-table.

4.

It was answered by the secretary.

She was dressed in blue linen, with white collar and cuffs, a dress that looked refreshingly cool and clean. Her abundant hair — in colour it was light brown with a darker streak in it, almost chestnut, which gave it distinction and interest — was brushed back in a broad wave from her forehead and dressed in a heavy knot in the nape of her neck. Her age at this time was thirty-seven, but with her slight figure and almost unlined face she appeared quite seven years younger. Only her mouth betrayed her: a hardness in the expression, a set of the slightly projecting underlip, that indicated temper and bitter experience.

"Did you want me, Mrs. Murgatroyd?" she asked, and looked frankly at her employer. Lola Stahl had blue eyes, deep and expressive.

"I want to introduce you to my friend, Cecil Barker," said Mrs. Murgatroyd.

Barker had risen as Lola entered. He looked at her now with his kindest smile.

"My dear girl," he said, and as he spoke he laid his hand on her shoulder, "I have a message for you from that dear, good husband of yours."

Lola winced. A psychologist might have wondered that so sensitive an organism should have furnished so long a reaction time. Barker, with his hand on her shoulder, mentally classified the wince as histrionic.

Mrs. Murgatroyd had walked over to the window. Lola had to work on her own initiative without direction from her commanding officer.

"What is the message?" she asked at last.

"He wants you to forget the past and begin again."

"There are things one can never forget," returned

Lola with intensity, and the projection of her underlip became a shade more pronounced.

"You need not be afraid that he'll ever see Madeline Paignton again," returned Barker. "That's over and done with. He wants you. You are the only woman who has ever influenced him, the only woman he has ever loved."

"He has told you that?" asked Lola.

"That and much more," said Barker. "He has admitted that all the fault was his."

Lola hesitated. "Is he working?" she asked at last.

"As my secretary at present," said Barker, "but I am going to find him a job. He has plenty of ability, and he has learnt his lesson; he won't idle."

Lola glanced once more at the broad silhouette of Mrs. Murgatroyd's back.

Barker was talking again, using his most seductive smile and tone, putting it before Lola that the greatest thing she could do was, perhaps, the hardest; that only a fine spirit could overlook such an injury as she had suffered; and that an opportunity was given her of making the man, her husband, a great and good man, of lifting him out of the mud by her help, encouragement, and example; and that in doing this she would learn to love him again and find perfect happiness through the initial act of self-sacrifice.

He was very convincing, and incidentally he told her, with every appearance of sincerity, that he was sure she had a great and beautiful soul. Lola listened with downcast eyes. She was flattered. For some weeks she had been entering with all her remarkable powers of adaptation into the life of devotion. She had not left Frank Reade because he was in financial difficulties, nor because he was exhibiting the first signs of ennui; but because she had succumbed

to the attraction of Mrs. Murgatroyd's personality, and because she found the prospect of the new life exciting. She still found it intensely interesting. She experienced, daily, emotions of delicious virtue when she had successfully performed some unpleasant duty in the cause of salvation. She revelled in the adoration of the factory girls among whom she worked. She spent much time on her knees in an ecstasy of renunciation. Above all, she worshipped Mrs. Murgatroyd. The sole temptation of the Vicar's appeal, lay in the fact that it was addressed to just those emotions which she had been so sedulously cultivating. She accepted at his valuation the worth of reconciliation with her husband. She regarded it through Barker's eyes, as a supreme act of self-sacrifice.

Two things influenced her answer, however. One was a very vivid and accurate imagination: she pictured her new life with Jacob, and knew that it would differ in no essential from the life they had lived before; she saw clearly enough that her new-found virtue would soon fade in such difficult surroundings. Yet, even so, she might have consented in order to gain approval at the moment as the perfect martyr, if it had not been for the other influence.

While the Vicar had been speaking Lola had observed the solid shoulders that were outlined against the window. She had seen, once, the intimation of a shrug from those massive shoulders.

"I shall never go back to my husband," said Lola, in a low, tense voice. "It would be bad for both of us. I have given myself up to the service of the Church. I hope he will do the same."

Cecil Barker was startled. "Can't you be honest?" he asked.

Mrs. Murgatroyd intervened quickly. "You are perfectly right, Lola," she said, coming away from the window —"perfectly right. I am very glad, dear, that you have chosen as you have. You may leave us now."

Lola looked at her employer with brimming eyes, paused a moment, gently touched one of Mrs. Murgatroyd's capable hands — it was an act of perfect devotion — and then left the room quickly.

5.

"Hysterical creature!" remarked Barker, when the two powers were alone.

"She has more force of character than I thought," replied Mrs. Murgatroyd.

"You must persuade her," said Barker.

"Never!" said Mrs. Murgatroyd.

Barker twisted his mouth. "I am sorry to see this personal prejudice coming into your work," he said. "You are defending your private fault by attempting to uphold this poor girl in the same sin."

Mrs. Murgatroyd's shrug of the shoulders was very patent this time. "My dear man," she said, "what is the good of persuading these two people to live together? They can't make each other happy. You admit that?"

"Of course, if we are only living for the sake of happiness . . ."

"Well, do you imagine that it will promote their spiritual welfare to live together?"

"That doesn't interest me," said Barker.

"What does interest you, for goodness' sake?" Mrs. Murgatroyd demanded.

"To do the right thing when it is perfectly plain to me, and to help others to do the right thing."

"In this case, is it right because it is a question of conventional morality?"

"It is right because they owe a duty to each other, and because the plain act of self-sacrifice has been put before them."

"Is it sacrifice for the man? I suppose he wants her back?"

"He regards it as slaves regarded the galley bench."

"Really, Cecil, what a Jesuit you are!" said Mrs. Murgatroyd. "A few minutes ago you told that poor child that she was the only woman this man had ever loved."

"I wanted to see to which lure she responded most readily. She seems devoid of the sex longing."

"Happily, yes!"

"And you intend to condone their sin?"

"It is no sin, in my opinion."

"Because it happens to be your own."

"You are very outspoken this morning."

"All this pretence," said Barker, "all this show of living for others, and the first plain duty is neglected. Does that state of things satisfy you?"

"That's my own affair," replied Mrs. Murgatroyd sharply. Barker had touched her where she was unprotected.

"It's very sad," he went on, "especially when you allow it to influence you with regard to others."

Mrs. Murgatroyd rose to her feet. "I am sorry you should have bothered to come all this way," she said, "but you see that it is no use pressing this affair. The Stahls are better apart."

Cecil Barker looked keenly at his antagonist, so keenly that she dropped her eyes before him. "I shall pray for you," he said as he went out.

6.

Jacob waited anxiously for the Vicar's report. It was presented at dinner.

"I saw your wife," said the Vicar.

"Did you? Yes?" said Jacob encouragingly.

"I couldn't live with her for a week," remarked the Vicar, with a grim smile.

"She is — is difficult, of course," ventured Jacob.

"Quite impossible," returned the Vicar.

"Have you settled anything?" asked Jacob, after a pause.

"She won't come back," said the Vicar, "so the responsibility is off your shoulders. Mrs. Murgatroyd has influenced her against you."

"But she doesn't know me," protested Jacob.

"Mrs. Murgatroyd is a very self-centred woman," said the Vicar. "She is allowing her own husband to starve while she lives in luxury. She judges your wife's case by her own."

"Oh! I thought Mrs. Murgatroyd was some kind of philanthropist," said Jacob.

"Pose!" replied the Vicar. "What a beautiful thing truth is, eh, Stahl!"

"Yes," said Jacob.

"And how rare!"

"Yes, very rare," assented Jacob.

CHAPTER VI

BARKER *v.* WOODHOUSE

1.

JACOB had been instructed that the responsibility of resuming his marital relations was "off *his* shoulders." The instructor had been no less an authority than his ethical hero of a Vicar, and still Jacob was not relieved. He lacked sophistry: when he was accused, he examined himself for the fault; when he was praised, he made some inquiry after the virtue. He never made out the best case for himself; nevertheless he was deductive as well as inductive.

In this matter of his responsibility towards his wife he found no excuse in the fact that Lola had refused to return to him. He had always expected a refusal. He could not understand why the Vicar should allow the affair to drop at this point. Surely it was now his duty to strain every nerve in carrying out the projected act of self-sacrifice. The thing was almost demonstrable by a syllogism. He worried over it on Monday night, and stated a case to the Vicar on Tuesday morning. He was told to beware of hypocrisy and hair-splitting. He puzzled over this advice, and finally decided that if this represented the Vicar's standpoint, his own was probably, for some unrecognized reason, unworthy. So he put the affair away from him with a sigh of relief, and turned his attention to such immediate business in living for others as was daily presented. He was hardly conscious for some days that the glory had gone out of

the business, had given place to an incipient and, as yet, almost subconscious criticism. Criticism kills ecstasy, as acid kills a flower.

On Thursday morning he had a visitor who brought a little light into his life.

He had half expected a letter or a visit from Madeline. He would have derived much pleasure from either, and his dreams had wavered between a picture of stern resolve — the attitude of the splendid ascetic — and a picture of delicious surrender to temptation and bold confrontation of the Vicar — the attitude of the splendid sinner. He found great enjoyment in his contemplation of both scenes, which he acted mentally with meticulous realism. He even supplied some excellent dialogue, and was almost tempted to commit it to paper, but that process was so tedious. In his imaginative recountals, he could avoid difficult descriptions by substituting pictures. He knew exactly how Madeline and the Vicar would look; to describe their appearance in written words was quite another matter.

It was certainly subject for regret that Madeline had taken no further notice of him; whatever his attitude in the event, Jacob could not have failed to derive excitement from another interview with her. He wondered whether it were possible to contrive a meeting, whether he could not find some excuse for writing to her.

When the bell rang on Thursday, a little after eleven, and he heard a feminine voice in the hall, Jacob hoped, for one ecstatic moment, that his dream had come to life. He was disappointed when Willis ushered in Miss Cairns, and told her that the Vicar was engaged. Willis seemed to imply that Miss Cairns had chosen a peculiarly inconvenient moment for her call.

"I say," she said to Jacob, when Willis, after adjusting the table cloth, which Jacob had rucked up in his literary fury, had made a reluctant exit —"I say, have I come at the wrong time? The Vicar said between eleven and twelve."

"Oh no! I'm sure it's all right; please sit down," said Jacob. "Willis is always like that. It's his manner; he's a very good chap, really."

Freda Cairns looked distinctly interesting and attractive that morning. She was wearing a white drill frock with a sailor collar, and straw hat. It was the sort of dress that was more appropriate to the seaside than to London, but it suited her rather sturdy figure, and helped to indicate very clearly that she had just come up from the country. That impression was assisted by the clear, healthy tan of her complexion. She looked very fresh and clean, and seemed redolent of open fields and hedges. Jacob found himself attracted by her firm, well-cut chin and the smoothness of her round, short neck.

"Isn't the Vicar splendid?" said Miss Cairns, with enthusiasm. "I *do* think he's wonderful."

"Oh yes, rather!" returned Jacob, with warmth. He was wondering whether he ought to make any reference to the Vicar's special interest in Miss Cairns's "case." Jacob had received a full account of the complications, and had wondered that the Vicar cared to make anyone the recipient of such a confidence. The matter was so very delicate. He decided to assume complete ignorance of Miss Cairns's private ambitions, but his knowledge of the facts piqued his curiosity. He hoped the Vicar would be successful with Miss Cairns; he seemed already to have gained an influence over her.

"It is such a splendid ideal, isn't it?" said Freda. "Almost too splendid."

Jacob suffered a twinge of criticism. He was not quite sure if the ideal were so splendid as Miss Cairns implied. "So difficult to live up to?" he said; he had no wish to damp the young woman's ardour. He wanted to save her from that married man of forty. Jacob felt sure he had a beard.

"I'm going to live up to it," asserted Freda, and she looked as if she were quite capable of fulfilling her promise.

"Are you?" replied Jacob. "Do you mean you're going to — to work with the Vicar?"

"Yes. I'm coming to live down here. Father says I may."

"Really! I am glad," said Jacob; and his face expressed warm approval of the project.

"Why?" asked Freda abruptly.

"I'm always glad when the Vicar — er — gets a new disciple," said Jacob, hedging.

"Of course, you're living for others, too," suggested Freda.

"I'm trying to," said Jacob. "It's — it's beastly difficult."

"Well, that's honest, anyway," replied Freda. She liked this secretary of the Vicar's. She thought he was nice-looking; she wondered if he had been very unhappy in his earlier life. He had a look of sadness, she thought; he wanted someone to look after him.

Jacob was thinking how delightful it would be to make love to a girl like this, if he were free — how delightful to marry her! He smiled at her reply. "I dare say you won't find it as difficult as I do," he said.

"Why?" asked Freda, with an amused lift of her eyebrows.

"More determination," replied Jacob.

She was flattered. "Do I look very determined?" she asked.

"Frightfully," returned Jacob, with a smile.

She had taken a seat at the table opposite to him; her elbows were resting on the cloth, her chin propped in her hands. Jacob had leaned slightly forward. They were looking into each other's eyes with frank amusement.

A sound distracted them. Woodhouse had come in through the farther room and was watching them. Jacob flushed uneasily. Freda pushed her chair back and tilted it on its hind legs.

"Is the Vicar disengaged?" asked Jacob of Woodhouse.

"Yes," said the junior curate. "He told me to ask Miss Cairns to go up to his study."

Freda jumped to her feet. "I suppose I shall see you again some time," she said to Jacob as she went out.

2.

Jacob had hardly seen Woodhouse since Sunday.

The curate threw himself back into his favourite armchair, and crossed his legs. He wore a look of patient long-suffering.

"I say, what a chap you are, Stahl!" he remarked.

"Why? What's up now?" asked Jacob.

"No wonder the Vicar had to keep an eye on you. I thought you were rather a puritanical beggar at first."

"What's the idea? What are you driving at?" asked Jacob irritably. He knew perfectly well what Woodhouse meant, but he wanted to have a clear statement, in order that he might refute it.

"I suppose you make love to every pretty woman?" said Woodhouse, with a feeble sneer. "Seem jolly successful at the business, too, as far as one can judge."

"Rot!" said Jacob.

"D'you do it because you like it," asked Woodhouse, "or are you playing up to the Vicar's peculiarities?"

"I simply don't know what you are talking about," said Jacob.

"Oh, rats!" returned Woodhouse succinctly.

"I haven't made love to any woman since I've been here," said Jacob, and returned to his interrupted letters.

There was silence for a few minutes, and Jacob made a valiant effort to concentrate his mind on his work. He was at the same time trying hard to believe that he had been disgusted by Woodhouse's insinuations.

Presently the curate broke out again. "It's a rotten system," he announced.

"What is?" asked Jacob, still writing.

"Barker's," returned Woodhouse laconically.

Jacob stopped writing and looked up. "I don't agree with you," he said. He was glad to take up the cudgels for the Vicar and forget his own feelings.

"Rotten!" repeated Woodhouse, his gaze fixed in a speculative abstraction.

"I don't know what you mean by 'a system,'" said Jacob, "but I think the Vicar's a very great man."

"Rotten!" said Woodhouse for the third time.

"Oh, any ass can sit in a chair and say 'rotten!'" said Jacob, with some heat; "but that doesn't alter the fact."

Woodhouse collected his thoughts, and regarded

Jacob with a patronizing sneer. "They all begin like you," he remarked. "I did. Now, wait a minute, and don't be so confoundedly self-opinionated. You haven't known the system as long as I have."

"What the dickens do you mean by the system?" asked Jacob.

"Pandering to the sinners and giving the saints the go-by. As long as you're a case, Barker's all over you, patting you on the shoulder, and calling you 'my dear old chap,' and all the rest of it; but as soon as he thinks you're going straight again, he doesn't care a damn what becomes of you. He just chucks you up and goes off after someone else."

"Oh, that's bosh!" said Jacob.

"I've seen it dozens of times," returned Woodhouse. "You've only known Barker ten days; I've known him for three months."

"Aren't you a bit ungrateful?" asked Jacob.

"Cant!" returned Woodhouse—"rotten cant! What do you suppose Barker cares for me? He's taken me in hand because that's the job he likes doing. He'll tell you himself that that's his form of gambling. He loves doing it. Where's the ingratitude come in?"

Jacob was flushed and angry. He disliked Woodhouse at the moment more than he had ever disliked him before, but he was conscious that he had no facts wherewith to contradict the slanderous statements that had been made. Moreover, he was wondering whether there was not some grain of truth in these accusations. He took what he believed to be a safe line of defence.

"Anyway, the Vicar devotes his whole life to others," he said. "I don't know how you feel about it, but I know jolly well that I wish I were like him."

"Piffle!" said Woodhouse. "I'm sick of it." He got up and went to the door. As he was going out, he turned and said: "I thought you were a decent sort, Stahl; but you seem to be developing into a canting sort of humbug. I should watch it if I were you."

He gave Jacob time to reply, but as no answer was returned he went out.

Jacob heard the front-door slam. "I loathe that man," he remarked to the chair recently vacated. "I'm damned if I ever speak to him again." He tried to return to his letter-writing, but his mind refused to consider any subject but that of Woodhouse. "I don't believe the Vicar really likes him," thought Jacob; and then: "I suppose he hates to be passed over; no one takes much notice of him. It's a sort of spiteful vanity." He made another essay of his task, but he found that the simplest epistolary sentence refused to frame itself. He found himself wondering whether the Vicar did throw people over, in a way, when they no longer seemed to need his assistance. . . .

3.

The second week of Jacob's secretaryship to Cecil Barker passed more quickly than the first. The Vicar went down to the country on Friday afternoon, and only returned in time for the evening sermon on Sunday. Jacob had some letters to write on Saturday morning, but after that he was free to do as he would. Unfortunately, he had very little money. He counted the sovereign he had received from the Vicar as a month's salary, and of that only ten shillings and eightpence remained; little enough to carry him on for another fortnight. He had never

had any explanation about that sovereign. Many times he had been on the verge of asking the Vicar whether it was intended as an advance, but something had always interposed. The Vicar had so many preoccupations.

With a virtual eightpence in his pocket, Jacob felt that he was not justified in going out into the country, so on Saturday he spent rather a dull afternoon in Hyde Park, had tea in Oxford Street, and walked back slowly as far as the Hampstead Road. When he arrived at "63," he found that he had not been expected to return to supper, and Willis was even more surly than usual when Jacob suggested that an egg might be boiled. Willis, when he had reluctantly accepted the suggestion, took it quite literally, and sent up one egg which was a suspiciously unnatural brown outside and an abomination within. Jacob found consolation in bread-and-butter, and made no attempt to love Willis in his heart.

He knew quite well that he was back-sliding, that the original fervour of his resolutions to live the life was become tepid and distasteful; yet he pricked and prodded himself into an imitation of determination, took himself to task with great frequency, and tried to simulate the ardour of the onset. It was useless, and the knowledge that it was useless was beginning to assert itself, but he fought that knowledge fiercely, denied it with many asseverations. He did not dare as yet to admit that he was once more defeated and a failure.

He had only seen Freda Cairns once since Tuesday. She had greeted him with a friendly smile, but he had had no opportunity for conversation with her. He was looking forward to Sunday evening. He knew she would be at even-song and supper. He might sit next to her in church; but he must be careful —

he must not give Woodhouse another opportunity to make himself unpleasant.

Woodhouse had not put in an appearance since Tuesday. Jacob hoped that he might be away. The thought of Woodhouse was not conducive to brotherly love. . . .

On Sunday morning Jacob decided to resume his literary efforts. He was still awaiting the return of two short stories submitted to the editor of a prosperous magazine. In moments of unusual optimism he had visions of the stories being accepted, but even in less exalted moments the thought that there was "some of his stuff out in the world," a chance that his great ambition might be realized, gave him a feeling of satisfaction; it was something to hope for, a potential excitement. Also, it was frequently an excuse for his failure to persist in this form of endeavour. It did not seem worth while to go on writing until he had received a verdict on those attempts which had gone out on their adventures. The two stories that had not yet evoked any sort of verdict had been launched two months before. He thought the length of their absence was a good sign; so often his manuscripts returned within a week. He could not rid himself of the idea that these rapid refusals implied disgust on the part of the editor.

On this Sunday morning he disinterred some of his rejected manuscripts from the depths of his portmanteau, which he had not as yet fully unpacked. He noted this mark of idleness, and determined to remedy it — soon; not at once, because he was going to work, and delay was fatal.

He read over two or three of his efforts at story-writing, and frowned. He recognized that some passages were "not half bad," but he saw also that the whole lacked structure, continuity — that the climax

failed to be dramatic. He also recognized that the curious quality of style, though marked in the few passages he approved, did not permeate the whole. "I wonder," thought Jacob, with his fingers in his hair, "just what's wrong with these things. I know they're not good enough, but I can't see why."

He found himself reverting to his old futile "I must." "I must read good short stories, and analyze them," he was thinking. "I must study style." A wave of disgust flooded him, a contempt and loathing of his own ineptitude. He ran his fingers through his hair again, and then with a quick impatience began to walk up and down the room. "What is wrong with me?" was the thought in his mind. "Why do I go on saying, 'I must do this and that,' and never do it? What, above all, is it that makes me for ever want to do something? If I am a hopeless incapable, why can't I be content to go on working at little commonplace tasks so long as they bring in enough to live upon?"

That was a problem beyond his capacity to solve. Many solutions have been offered, but none is universally accepted. Why, indeed, was this man, Jacob Stahl, so goaded and driven? He had no ambition as it is ordinarily understood. He did not desire either money or fame; these were not the goals he visualized when he pictured success. Money and the conveniences of wealth made little appeal to him; freedom from the petty annoyances and restrictions of poverty he desired, but only as a means to some dimly conceived end. Fame, it is true, had entered into the dreams of his waking life, but an idealized fame such as he could never hope to achieve in the world of reality. In the visions that had come to him in the past few weeks, his ideal of fame had been almost Christ-like; he had seen himself as a world-teacher.

He had no ambition to become a society novelist, to attain constant mention in newspaper paragraphs; he had no dreams of enormous circulations. Yet the goad pricked him continually. He reproached himself for wasted time, and the remedy which was always before him was the pen. "I must write," was his feeble protest, while he never attempted to learn the elements of the art of writing by a devotion to study.

On this morning of analysis which failed to reveal any element by the process of thought, he did, nevertheless, stumble upon some result which was to help him, later, to some solution of his personal difficulty. But at the time he failed to make any application of his discovery — did not, indeed, recognize it as discovery.

Irritated and perplexed by his fierce groping after some meaning in his own life, and yet in some curious way invigorated by the effort to concentrate his thoughts, he went over to the window and began to play with the idea of suicide. He watched the little trifling happenings in Acacia Avenue, and then with a sudden inspiration sat down at the table and began to write.

He began to describe the detail of life he had just seen, from the point of view of a man on the verge of suicide. He became engrossed in the process, and wove a thread of story into his description. He pictured a woman's intrusion at the critical moment. The woman had suddenly become a determining cause of the man's intention. He finished in a fine fury with three dramatic, if somewhat oversentimental, sentences. He was astounded when Willis came in to lay the lunch at half-past one.

He read over his effusion as he ate. At first he was delighted with it, and then the reaction came. "It's all right," was his final pronouncement. "It's

quite good in its way, but not a bit the kind of stuff editors want. I suppose this is only another phase of wasting time. The things I like to write are no use."

Later in the afternoon he read his sketch again, and was still pleased with it. "If I can write this kind of thing, I must be able to write other things," he thought.

He ended, as he had begun, on a note of futile determination.

4.

Two seats in the nave of St. Mark's are reserved for the Vicar's visitors; they are distinguished by a red cord with brass hooks which guards the ingress from the aisle. Late comers often fumble with this cord in the endeavour to release the brass hook, or drop it with a bang against the bench-end — a most embarrassing disturbance. Others have been known to overlook the cord, and press an entrance against its resistance; it did not require a great expenditure of force to overcome the liaison of cord and hook. The card in the neat brass frame screwed to the book-board was inscribed "The Vicar."

Jacob had not discovered these seats on his first visit to St. Mark's, nor was he guided thither on this Sunday evening by old Boyle, whose duty it was to mark down and pilot the probable guests at the Vicar's supper-table. Old Boyle assumed that the secretary knew the ropes.

Jacob was guided to these preserves by the sight of Freda Cairns's hat. He sighted the hat when he was half-way up the central aisle, hesitated, and would possibly have sat discreetly in some seat within observing distance, had not Freda turned and looked

straight at him. It was doubtful whether she saw him, but he thought she did, and was encouraged to dare an entry. She smiled a faint approval of his appearance, obviously tempered by her knowledge that she was in a sacred building. Jacob returned the smile in kind, an intimation that he appreciated her reserve and understood the restrictions of time and place. Already a mumbling from the vestry, terminated by a loudly intoned " Amen " from the choir, advertised to the congregation and the organist that service had begun.

Jacob noticed with a frown that Woodhouse was in his place, but the senior curate read the service.

Fred Boyle read the first lesson with his usual aggravating drone, which aped solemnity and achieved indistinctness. Jacob was relieved to see Woodhouse come out for the second lesson. Woodhouse's reading was not, perhaps, very devout, but it had a dramatic quality, and was certainly distinct.

Jacob had resolved not to look at Freda during the service, but as he leaned back in his seat to await the second lesson he was conscious of her presence; he found that by fixing his gaze on the lower part of the pulpit he could just include Freda in the edge of his field of vision without appearing he believed, to be looking at her. It was not a very distinct picture that he achieved, and it was tiring to the eyes, but he was so intent on his experiment that he missed the opening of the lesson.

His attention was diverted from his attempt to focus two objects at once by the sound of a general rustle among the congregation. People were whispering and fidgeting; there was, too, a curious stir among the crowd of worshippers which could be sensed as well as heard. Jacob looked round over his shoulders; he thought that someone had, perhaps,

fainted, but he saw that every eye was turned to the lectern. He became aware of an odd feeling of anxiety. He, too, turned to look at the junior curate.

Woodhouse was certainly reading the lesson rather queerly. He was leaning forward over the big Bible and grasping a wing of the eagle in either hand. His voice had dropped to a confused stuttering rumble. Jacob could hardly catch the words. "Th'eyes y'runderstand'n b'enlightard thary'may know whas 'ope of's calling. . . ."

Woodhouse must be ill.

Such, apparently, was the idea of the senior curate, for he was watching his junior with earnest attention. The rustle among the congregation was becoming more marked. Two women in the pew behind Jacob were whispering audibly: "Why doesn't someone stop him?" he heard.

The same thought had evidently occurred to the senior curate. He beckoned to Fred Boyle across the choir, and held a brief whispered consultation. Fred seemed unwilling to obey instructions, but at last he walked hesitatingly down to the lectern. His unpleasant task was made easy for him, for at that moment Woodhouse suddenly gave way at the knees, clutched at the eagle, and nearly upset the whole lectern; finally flopped helplessly to the floor. Fred gallantly saved the fall of the lectern, and then he and another member of the choir supported Mr. Woodhouse into the vestry.

The organist received his cue from the senior curate, and broke immediately into the *Nunc Dimittis*.

Before the Vicar began his sermon he made a sympathetic reference to the sudden illness of our dear brother Woodhouse, who had been seized with an attack of heat apoplexy.

5.

"How dreadful for poor Mr. Woodhouse!" said Freda.

Jacob agreed. "He's been rather queer lately," he said. "The morning you came down he was talking in an odd way, slanging the Vicar. . . ."

"You don't mean that you think he's going off his head?" asked Freda.

The thought had not occurred to Jacob till she suggested it, but Woodhouse's insanity presented itself as a likely and interesting solution.

"I don't know; I hope not," he said. "But he's certainly been very funny this last week."

"How dreadful!" repeated Freda, as they reached the door of "63."

The habitués who were awaiting supper were not so innocent, but they did not air their views. "Heat apoplexy" had been the explanation from the pulpit, and until they were given another cue that was the line they meant to abide by. Nevertheless, there was an air of mystery about them; an expression that denoted a reserve which they would have been quite willing to cast off.

Jacob approached old Boyle. The excitement of the moment was sufficient excuse to forget the strained relations of a week before. "How is he, do you know?" he asked without troubling to characterize the pronoun. There was but one person who could be intended just then. Woodhouse had achieved celebrity.

Old Boyle looked shrewdly at Jacob. "Oh, he's all right now!" he said.

"It isn't serious, then?" asked Jacob, at heart a little disappointed to be robbed of the excitement.

"Think not?" said old Boyle cryptically.

"Well, you said it wasn't," objected Jacob.

Old Boyle looked cynical. "Depends what you call serious," he said. "I meant he wasn't likely to die just yet, that's all."

"You don't mean that he's gone off his head, do you?" said Jacob.

"If you want to be charitable," remarked Mr. Boyle, and moved away.

"What's the old fool driving at?" wondered Jacob. He was piqued by old Boyle's assumption of a superior knowledge which he did not intend to disclose. "What's the mystery? Surely he might have told me. Old fool!" he added mentally. The Vicar's sermon had fallen on barren ground to-night.

Nor was the Vicar a great success at supper. He avoided the topic of the hour with diligence, and his attempt to arouse an interest in the subject of his sermon was a dead failure. There were comparatively few visitors that evening. The next day would be the August Bank Holiday, and many even of the regular frequenters of 63, were away.

Freda Cairns announced her intention of leaving early, and Jacob went with her to the High Street and put her in a tram. She asked whether he had heard any more news of Woodhouse, and Jacob repeated as nearly as he could remember his conversation with old Boyle.

"I shan't be down again just yet," she said. "We're going away for a fortnight or so; you might write and let me know."

"Rather," asserted Jacob; and she gave him her address.

When he returned to 63, he found only Fred Boyle in the downstairs room.

"Hullo!" said Jacob. "Everybody gone? Where's the Vicar?"

"Gone round to the clergy house," replied Fred.

"Oh!" said Jacob. "Is he there?"

For a moment he and Fred looked at one another, as though trying to gauge each other's thoughts. Then, by a common inspiration, they decided for this one evening to be familiars.

"Rum go, isn't it?" asked Fred.

"I don't quite understand what was up," said Jacob. "Has he gone dotty, or what?"

"Oh, my Lord!" said Fred. "Don't you know?" Jacob shook his head.

"He was as drunk as a fiddler," explained Fred. If anyone had expert knowledge on that subject, surely he had.

"Whew!" whistled Jacob, his mind suddenly illuminated. "What a fool I was! Why, of course. I thought last Sunday night he'd been drinking."

"Thompson and I got him round to the clergy-house somehow," explained Fred, "and Thompson put him to bed, while I dodged round here to tell the Vicar before he went to the church. He's in a fair old way about it, too, I can tell you. He asked me to stay here till he came back."

"What on earth made him go to the service and try to read the lesson when he was like that?" asked Jacob. "He must have known . . ."

"I supose he thought he'd pull through all right," said Fred reminiscently—"one does, you know. You don't realize how far gone you are."

"No, I suppose not," assented the inexperienced Jacob.

They continued to discuss the subject in all its bearings until the freshness of it had been used up, and they were both yawning.

"Here comes the Vicar," said Fred at last. "He's been a good old time."

The Vicar came straight into the dining-room. "It's very sad to see a god being led by the nose, eh?" he said. "To see a mind and a soul grovelling in the filth for the sake of a few dirty drops out of a bottle."

Fred looked self-conscious, and Jacob uncomfortable, because he thought the problem of the drink-craving deserved a subtler analysis. He did not venture any criticism, however; he thought the opportunity was hardly well-chosen. Instead he nodded gravely, and said: "I expect he's very sorry."

The Vicar's mouth twitched slightly. He understood Jacob's reserve, and disapproved. The Vicar meant this to be an object lesson to Fred, and he drove his point home. "A pitiable sight," he said, disregarding Jacob's remark —"the most pitiable." He made good his illustration by somewhat virulent metaphor, but he attained his end. Fred Boyle — the regenerate who had been a strict abstainer from alcohol for eighteen months, yet who had, indeed, suffered a curious twinge of vicarious pleasure in the prostration of Woodhouse, and had come to a stage of weakness — was braced again by the furious contempt of the Vicar. Fred was made to see the abasement and prostitution of his godhead that resulted from drunkenness, where he had just before seen a sort of abandoned jollity and dare-devilry.

When the Vicar realized that his point was won, he changed his attitude with ready tact. He knew the danger of over-emphasis. "No one knows the truth of this better than this dear fellow here," he said, patting a hand on Fred's shoulder. "He has won back his own respect and ours. There is no fear for him now, eh, old chap?"

"Rather not," returned Fred, outwardly humble, but full of pride within, as Barker had intended he

should be. Barker had little respect for the virtue or saving power of humility.

"I am afraid poor Woodhouse must have been drinking secretly for some days past," said the Vicar, with a note of question in his voice.

Jacob remained silent; but Fred, all eagerness now to keep the Vicar's high opinion, said: "Mr. Stahl has just told me that he noticed something last Sunday."

Barker's face grew very grave. "What did you notice?" he said to Jacob, who — feeling, as he would have expressed it, a "beastly sneak,"— stammered: "Oh, nothing! I was probably mistaken."

"You told me you thought he smelt of whisky at supper," prompted Fred.

"I may have been mistaken," repeated Jacob.

"Oh, my dear fellow!" said Barker; "and you allow some meaningless little schoolboy convention of honour to guide you, and let this man fall into the gutter."

"What could I have done?" protested Jacob.

"The brave, honest thing — the self-sacrificing thing. You should have spoken out, first to Woodhouse, and then to me. But no; because you had a sort of sneaking wish to keep this poor fellow's respect . . ."

"Oh no!" broke in Jacob; "it wasn't that. Woodhouse and I were not at all on good terms."

"Was that why you let him go to the devil, and made no attempt to save him?"

Jacob was no match for the Vicar in casuistry; he found himself in a cul-de-sac. It appeared on the face of things that he was completely in the wrong, and he was forced to admit that he should certainly have spoken to Woodhouse, even if he had earned more justly that description of himself which still

stuck in his mind —"a canting sort of humbug." Nevertheless he still retained the feeling that he could not have gone to the Vicar. That feeling was instinctive.

"I — I didn't think of it in that light," was all he found to say.

"I'm afraid you are pitiably weak, Stahl," said Barker. "It is, perhaps, a dispensation of Providence that you have no serious vices to combat, only that feeble eroticism which makes you the prey of any foul woman."

Barker would surely have made a splendid instrument for the Grand Inquisitor; he had the genius to devise the subtlest of tortures, the ruthlessness to inflict them; and he acted, regardless of opinion, with a magnificent courage which made his acts appear as the discipline of the surgeon.

Jacob writhed under the lecture, wishing that he could repudiate the charge of weakness. Barker knew so well the tender places.

"I suppose I ought to have tackled Woodhouse," said Jacob; "but it wouldn't have been the least use . . ."

"Because you had done nothing to win his respect," interpolated the Vicar.

Again Jacob had to admit the unpalatable truth of the statement. "Well, I admit that," he said reluctantly —"I admit that. I know I'm no good; but that's the very reason why I couldn't interfere — why I couldn't come to you with tales about Mr. Woodhouse."

"H'm!" said the Vicar, still with an eye of judicial disapproval; "you've a rough sort of loyalty, Stahl. It's a pity you can't apply it to better uses."

While the Vicar had been, indirectly, censuring Fred Boyle, Jacob had felt uncomfortable, anxious

to get away; his sympathy had been with the victim, whom he would gladly have delivered from torture. But when Jacob took Fred's place, Fred found a grim pleasure in watching the writhings of the victim; he enjoyed the performance inwardly, while he maintained an air of glum aloofness. One sees that Barker and the world in general would have classified Fred Boyle as "a much stronger character" than Jacob Stahl. It is, doubtless, a sign of weakness to have too great a compassion for the suffering.

There was still one more indignity for Jacob to suffer. The Vicar added no more to his direct rebuke, but he strengthened it subtly in the prayer which immediately followed. "Give us all the courage to be honest in defiance of the world's opinion," was the substance of the suggestion he proffered to the Almighty that night.

Jacob, in his own room, was leaning towards revolt. The Vicar was still admirable, but he was displaying more human fallibilities and limitations. In the stillness of the night Jacob was coldly critical. He gave Barker credit for many fine qualities, but he had begun to doubt the soundness of Barker's method. Woodhouse had called it a system. Jacob, the freethinker, had little respect for anything so hidebound as a system. Before he went to sleep he even conceived the thought of putting the Vicar into a novel!

6.

No one had ever seen Cecil Barker in a passion of anger; he was too strong and too courageous a man to lose control of himself. It is usually the moral or physical coward who gives way to temper; he gains thereby a temporary courage. Barker's anger was slow and restrained, its outward symptom a cruelty

that was almost vindictive. Jacob did not realize that the Vicar was being stirred by one of his fits of slow wrath when he returned from the clergy-house on Sunday night; nor did Jacob understand that this was the true cause of much unpleasantness during the ensuing week.

Barker hated to be thwarted; to be set at defiance by the placid and supposedly reformed Woodhouse, was gall and wormwood.

For Woodhouse was in open revolt. He refused to be reconverted. He permitted the Vicar to come and see him, but scorned alike overtures of friendship, rebukes, and prayers.

"No good patting me about, Barker," he said, repulsing the hand which was laid on his shoulder; "and I'm not your 'dear old chap.' I'm sick of all this palaver business; you can keep it for canting little hypocrites like Stahl. I know your game too well. I've learned all your dodges."

When the Vicar tried to get home with some bitter truth about Woodhouse's degradation, Woodhouse sneered. "I may be going to the gutter," he said, "but, thank God, I can be honest over it!" Prayers he openly scoffed at. "I don't believe all that damned rot," he remarked; "it isn't true, and I've done with it."

The threat of a full report to the Bishop did not stir him. "Report away," he said. "Unfrock me, if you like; it won't make any difference. I'm going to chuck the canting business, anyway. You've made me sick of it."

This should have appealed to Barker as a very big fish indeed; so determined and violent a sinner should have been worth an infinity of trouble. But Barker realized, as a good fisherman should, when the quarry was too heavy for his tackle; he saw that

there were times when it was better to snap the line rather than to let his fish break away — a disaster which might mean loss of prestige and loss of self-confidence.

So Barker did the deliberately brutal thing; he wrote to the Bishop, and he turned Woodhouse away with ignominy. Woodhouse went with a sneer.

"I guessed what all your profession of charity amounted to," was his last shaft.

Jacob heard little of the detail of this riot, but for some days he suffered from its reflection in the Vicar's mood.

It was not till ten days after the historic scene in St. Mark's Church that Jacob heard the junior curate's epitaph.

The Vicar had discovered a new and promising case — a poet of some reputation who was spending his body to the detriment of his mind — and in the hope of new victory he had found forgetfulness of his defeat.

"Has Mr. Woodhouse gone away?" Jacob asked one evening, when the moral atmosphere had noticeably cleared.

"Yes, poor fellow!" said the Vicar. "A man of splendid abilities, but criminally weak. The vice of selfishness panders to every form of lust. Isn't that true, my dear fellow . . .?"

The next day the Vicar went away for a month's holiday. He was going to Norway with the poet. Before he went he gave Jacob three pounds, and told him to get on with his literary work. Incidentally, Jacob was left in control of the Antol Fund and of the Vicar's correspondence.

CHAPTER VII

LIFE AND LETTERS

1.

Jacob Stahl made little progress towards the ideal of self-negation during his month's holiday. He had been left without explicit instructions. In August it appeared that the energies of St. Mark's parish were in abeyance. Mr. Goldring, the senior curate, did all that was necessary in the way of conducting services, marrying, christening, and churching. The burying was done at some cemetery, by an expert who knew the service so well that he forgot every word of it if he stopped to think what it meant, but, if started at any point, would continue automatically until he came to the end. His wife absolutely forbade the mention of such household words as "dust" or "ashes" in his hearing. Mr. Goldring seemed to require no help in the performance of these and other duties, so Jacob did not press his services at the boys' club; he had not been a great success there. As soon as the Vicar had left town, his correspondence began to fall off; a meagre half-dozen letters or so, half of which required no answer, was all that called for Jacob's attention. He decided that Fate had given him this glorious opportunity to write.

For some time past he had had the scheme of a novel in his mind, and he decided to begin upon that. It was a novel with a plot which he had worked out — rather well, he thought — and it contained one very

dramatic situation which he believed was quite original.

He worked steadily on this book during the Vicar's absence. He wrote every morning from nine till one o'clock, and, with a few exceptions, every evening from five till eight. He wrote fairly fast, on the whole, and his pile of manuscript became a delight to him. He would take it up and weigh it in his hands. He was proud of having written so many words. He kept a careful count of them. He had decided that about eighty thousand would be sufficient for the novel, and as he averaged nearly four thousand words every day, he hoped to have finished the whole work before the Vicar returned.

He was a little discouraged by the reappearance of his two short stories a few days after he had begun his new work. The envelope contained no apology for delay: merely the manuscripts — which were not typed — and two printed slips announcing the usual regrets of the editor. The two slips were duplicates — probably one for each story. They gave no data for any satisfactory induction.

Jacob decided that he could not write short stories. For an hour or two he felt discouraged, but the next morning he returned to his novel with renewed zest.

As a novel its chief failing was that the characters did not fit the plot. Jacob had had some difficulty about his first chapter, and finally, in despair to make a beginning, he had allowed his hero, a barrister, and inferentially a man of action, to make his début as a dreamer, sitting in his chambers and watching the first spurt of green on a plane tree in the Temple. It was in many ways a promising and interesting opening, but the barrister refused to change his character, and when he was required to develop traits of

keenness and moral courage, he hedged disgustingly and in a way that necessitated minor alterations to the plot. He was a pattern of the rest. Jacob became interested in his characters, developed them in ways that had no relation to the story, and then suddenly drove them head first into the mould of his plot, from which they emerged strangely altered, for the moment, but with a tendency to revert to the earlier type.

When Jacob had written three-quarters of his book, he began to sigh over the thought of it, and could only find consolation by rereading some of the more effective passages; they were always those passages which had little or no connection with the plot. Nevertheless, he persisted. . . .

2.

Once he was strongly tempted to abandon that novel and begin another of a very different type.

One Saturday afternoon, at the beginning of his third week of novel-writing, he grew conscious of his loneliness, and went out to seek companionship in the wilderness of London.

He found Hyde Park interesting enough, even though it was forsaken by the elect. He wandered over to the Serpentine and watched the nursemaids of Bayswater for a time, and then turned westward. He found a single chair, folded and leaning against a tree in the open country, now marked by a tea-house, which looks as though it had been moved from the Zoological Gardens. He decided to rest there for a time and develop the action of his novel. But though his imagination was active enough on that afternoon it refused to deal with so familiar a subject. Jacob found the thought of his book as nauseating in these

surroundings as the thought of Camden Town, or of the eggs with which Willis so persistently fed him. So he allowed his mind to have its own way, and dreamed happily enough of impossible miracles and other things which had little relation to reality. . . .

Quite inappropriately the thought of Madeline presented itself. He wondered whether she had given him up without a qualm, or had respected him for his steadfast refusal. He wondered, also, whether, if Madeline appeared at this minute, he would still refuse her if she made love to him. He decided that he would not.

He looked up and saw the subject of his thought coming towards him.

She was not alone. Her companion was a tall, handsome man with a dark moustache and a bronzed face. He was perfectly dressed, obviously one of the elect; and he was talking eagerly and quickly to Madeline, who was responding with vivacity.

They were coming directly towards Jacob. His first impulse was to run away, but he postponed the action until it was too late. Should he bow? He remembered that he might leave the initiative to Madeline. He kept his eyes down until she was within five yards of him, and then looked straight up at her.

She returned his gaze without any sign of recognition. He watched them until they were out of sight, and then he got up wearily, and made his way towards Hyde Park Corner.

It was what he should have expected, he knew that; but he was suddenly depressed, miserable. He found no consolation in the thought that he had once been Madeline's lover; he could only compare his own present inefficiency with the completeness of that splendid creature with whom he had just seen her — so

bronzed, so masculine, so much at his ease, so well-dressed. How absurd to suppose that this shabby, pale-faced failure from Camden Town could ever hope to compete with that magnificent male!

Jacob could summon up no pride in his own personality. He was sick of himself and weary of being alone. He determined that he would, at least, find someone to talk to, someone who would have no right to despise him.

He took a bus up Piccadilly, and went into one of the restaurants near the Circus. The ground floor was crowded, though it was the end of August, and in a sudden fit of nervousness he went down to the smoking-room. He found a quiet little table in a corner.

He thought of beginning a conversation with the waitress, a very superior young woman with an extraordinarily elaborate coiffure. He looked at her very hard as he ordered tea and toast, but she gave him no spark of encouragement.

The room was fairly full of young men and women. The majority of the women were of the shopgirl class. They were not quite at home in their surroundings; giggled at every facetious remark of their cavaliers (none of them was alone), and looked round surreptitiously, half afraid lest any of those superior beings whom they saw daily on the free side of counters, or before whom they posed in show-rooms, should be at some table near at hand, critical, contemptuous. To be on the safe side and to impress their cavaliers, these girls attempted an imitation of what they supposed to be correct manners, ate small mouthfuls and left large pieces of cake on their plates, drank mincingly, cocked their little fingers away from everything they touched, and constantly convinced themselves by half-concealed pattings and glances into

mirrors, that coiffure and toilet were not disarranged. The men, mainly young city clerks — the Stock Exchange was well represented on its apprentice side — exhibited the masculine aspect of the same attitude. They lounged in their chairs, talked with cigarettes hanging from their mouths, rammed their hands deep into trouser pockets, and assumed an air which they deemed rakish and nonchalant. Their wit was chiefly criticism of the other tea-drinkers, enlivened by pungent slang, to which the women responded with little bursts of forced laughter or a pretence of being shocked. It was a great game of make-believe, all artificial. Men and women were playing up to some imaginary gallery, believed themselves to be observed and admired. Just as they were occasionally doubtful of the social standing of some of the other visitors, so they hoped that they themselves might be mistaken for something other than they were.

It may have been that this atmosphere of artificiality had its effect upon the one solitary tea-drinker at his lonely little table, squeezed in under the soffit of the stairs. He, too, began to dream, but his dreams were of a different shape and texture. If he acted a part it was evolved from no idealized conception of small differences in the social scale, but from what he then fancied to be the epitome of his own life. At first he made a personal application of his dream, but presently it took possession of him; he was no longer the actor, but the observer; the little vanity of self-pity forsook him in the glory of an act of thought which was not completely under his own control.

Within him was conceived the story of a man who longed passionately for love, sympathy, and admiration, but who was dumb to express his longing; who by some twist of fate was unable to attract love or

admiration from either man or woman. The secret lay in the fact that the man had a feminine soul imprisoned in his masculine body, a soul which expressed itself in the manner of a woman. When he loved a woman, he was backward, modest, almost coy. He shrank from making any advance, preferred to worship at a distance; yet always with that passionate desire to be loved in return, simply, naturally, without the need for any act or effort on his own part. Men repelled him. He found them too coarse for his somewhat effeminate sensibilities. He could have adored a man if he could have found his ideal of perfect manhood, but there was no such ideal to be found in his world. The man was a failure, a decadent without genius, a thing to pity and despise — had it not been for this one intense passion for love. . . .

Jacob saw him in his mind's eye, a man that was not himself and yet was a part of himself, a creature at once weaker in mind and stronger in desire than himself.

The picture came to Jacob as a vision and an inspiration. The whole life of the man presented itself to him with vivid, convincing detail; the story was unrolled down to the last despairing cry of the suicide. "If I could have found one human being to love me without doubt or question, I should not have failed." Jacob thought that the very spirit of the man was there in that close, smoky, underground room, still seeking desperately among all that artificiality and make-believe for some impossible true sister-soul to love him.

That conception bore Jacob home through a world of illusion. He had forgotten his desire for a companion, his resolve to satisfy, impurely, the lust of the flesh in order that by so doing he could act a dream.

It was not till he was actually back in the gloomy dining-room at Acacia Avenue, sitting before a sheet of paper with a pen in his hand, that his inspiration began to fail. The mechanical effort of finding words for the glorious thoughts that had played so fluently before his mind was irksome. When he began to write he found himself describing, not his dream, but its *milieu;* the story itself was only suggested. He covered two sheets of foolscap, read them over, and then put them carefully away. "Some day I may be able to write that story," he thought. "I have not the skill to do it yet. I must go on with this thing that I have begun." He regarded his pile of manuscript with disgust.

That evening he made little application of his vision to the facts of his own life; but very soon he was to see himself as the hero of his own invention, to believe for a time that that part of himself which he had so detached and observed was in very fact the whole. It was true that save for the woman who had adopted him and spent more than a mother's love upon him, the woman whose love he had treated all so lightly, there had never been in his life any human being who had truly loved him.

Not till he was in bed did he remember Madeline. There could only be one explanation of her presence in London during that season — she was conducting another illicit love-affair. Oh, well, that was the kind of woman she was, not worth wasting a thought upon; he did not care, now, what became of her; he wished never to see her again. He half regretted that he had not carried out the original programme he had framed before he went to the tea-shop in Piccadilly. To-morrow, however, he would go on with that stupid, machine-made novel of his. It was just possible that it might have virtues he had overlooked. After all,

an awful lot of rot got published somehow. He sighed, and went to sleep.

3.

He finished his novel before the Vicar returned.

He was not proud of it. He knew it was patchy, that it had no "grip," that the story did not develop to any climax. Yet he had a lurking satisfaction in the thing. He had covered an immense quantity of paper, a fact which gave him some cause for congratulation — at least, he had not been wasting time. Beyond this he found pleasure in the treatment of a situation here and there, a touch of characterization, a few lines of description. He had a sneaking hope that the remainder was good enough to pass muster, that a publisher might find virtues which the author himself could not discover. At the very worst the novel had been a means of experience, it had taught him something of his own powers and limitations. He had no idea how he was to get his manuscript typed, but he hoped the Vicar might have some protégé who would do it cheaply.

He had not seen Miss Cairns again. He had written and given her a description of the Woodhouse affair; a bad description, because he felt himself constrained by the necessity to put Woodhouse's failings from sobriety and gratitude in the most favourable light. It was a subject, thus treated, which gave no scope. Freda had replied with a few conventional phrases, and had told him that she would not be returning to Rickmansworth for another fortnight. Jacob, during the last two days of the Vicar's holiday, had some thought of paying Cairns a surprise visit, but he feared that he might be an unwelcome visitor. Inwardly he nursed a slight grudge against Cairns —

"Cairns might have asked me to come and see them," he thought.

There was only one incident to mark the last week of the Vicar's absence, and that seemed to promise little at the time.

One morning he heard a feminine voice in the hall inquiring for Mr. Barker. Jacob knew Willis's methods with all callers, and politeness or curiosity prompted him to go and offer his services. (Willis was so infernally officious, he never thought of referring any inquiry to the secretary.)

"Can I be of any use?" asked Jacob, addressing a rather tall, dark woman, who was standing on the doorstep. "I'm Mr. Barker's secretary," he added.

"I've told the lady Mr. Barker won't be 'ome till Friday," grumbled Willis.

The tall woman smiled at Jacob. "Could you spare me a minute or two?" she said.

"Oh yes, certainly," replied Jacob. "Will you come in?"

Willis grunted disapprovingly, and left them to their own devices.

Jacob found a chair for his visitor. She was a woman of forty, perhaps; not good-looking, her mouth was too large, her eyes were dull and expressionless.

"I mustn't keep you," she said smiling. "I've really no message for Mr. Barker, but when you came out, I felt that I simply must do something to score off Willis. He is such a boor, isn't he?"

"Oh, good!" responded Jacob. "I quite agree. He's a perfect Cerberus . . ." He paused, uncertain whether his new acquaintance would understand the allusion.

She lifted her scanty eyebrows, and drew down the corners of her mouth, affecting to be mildly shocked.

"What would the Vicar say to that illustration?" she asked. "I've always been led to understand that this was the ante-chamber to heaven, not the other place."

Jacob laughed. "I hope Peter won't be like Willis," he said.

Jacob and the woman looked at each other with mutual appreciation.

"And what are *you* doing down here?" she asked, looking at the pile of foolscap on the table. "Editing a volume of sermons for Mr. Barker?"

"N-no," said Jacob; "there hasn't been much to do while the Vicar was away. This is my own stuff."

"Do you write?" asked the woman with interest. "That's very interesting."

Jacob would have given much to have been able to answer with a modest affirmative. "I'm trying to," he said. "I'm afraid I'm no good yet."

"Have you had any books published?" asked the woman.

Jacob smiled whimsically. "This is my first attempt at a book," he answered. "I've had no end of short stories refused."

"The best work doesn't get a chance," said his companion with assurance.

"I wish I could think that was the reason they refused mine," said Jacob.

"You are very modest about it all," said the woman.

Jacob sighed, and then smiled to show that he was not trying to win sympathy. "Mr. Barker has told me that modesty is a defect," he said.

"He's a curious person, isn't he?" said the woman, and then, getting up, she added: "But I mustn't interrupt you. I dare say I shall see you again if you are stopping here, and we will have a long talk

about literature. Will you tell Mr. Barker I'm coming down on Sunday? Mrs. Latimer, tell him. Thanks so much, I'm sorry to have bothered you."

"No bother at all," responded Jacob. They had suddenly dropped into conventional phrases again. He went with her to the door.

"I shall see you on Sunday, I suppose?" said Mrs. Latimer as she went out.

"Oh yes, I'm always here," replied Jacob.

He thought he should like Mrs. Latimer. He wished that she were not quite so plain.

4.

The Vicar came back looking very well and very brown. His bald head looked very white by contrast, rather like the top of a hard-boiled egg, peeping out of a shell broken away to a hard line.

He seemed full of energy and high spirits. The poet seemed likely to be a success; he had been inspired by the Vicar to begin a blank verse play of fine moral tendency. Barker told Jacob that the poet was a "splendid fellow," and was coming to St. Mark's for service on Sunday night. "He is going to be an influence in English literature," said the Vicar.

Jacob thought of his novel and blushed for it. He was nervous at the thought of meeting so great a light as the poet. Jacob remembered reading a long signed review of one of the poet's works, a notice in which the critic had boldly prophesied that the name of Philip Laurence would mark an epoch in English poetry. That was five years ago, however, and so far the prophecy seemed little likely to be fulfilled.

There were few letters on Saturday morning, and the Vicar had no appointments; he and Jacob sat

long over breakfast and talked. At first the conversation was a monologue. Barker enlarged on the subject of the poet, took him as an object lesson, and pointed out how the erotic tendency of his poetry had influenced his life, and would finally have killed his genius. The Vicar seemed to have studied Philip Laurence's work very thoroughly; he quoted it very aptly to his own purpose.

"And such a dear fellow!" concluded the Vicar.

"Is he? Yes!" said Jacob. He had been wondering whether he dare mention his own literary venture. He decided that he would say nothing unless he were asked. After all this talk of Philip Laurence's brilliant imagination, scholarship, and finished literary style, that novel appeared so hopelessly amateurish, such a feeble, emasculate effort. The Vicar, however, came straight to the point.

"And what have you been doing with yourself, old chap?" he asked. "Any of those short stories accepted yet?"

Jacob shook his head. "I — I've been attempting something bigger," he admitted. "I'm afraid it's no good."

"A novel?" asked the Vicar.

Jacob nodded.

"How far have you got with it?"

"I've finished it," replied Jacob, with his first sign of enthusiasm.

The Vicar looked surprised. "I say, that's quick work!" he said. "How long is it?"

"Eighty thousand words," replied Jacob. "That's about the length of the average novel." He glanced instinctively at the writing-table. The Vicar looked round over his shoulder and saw the pile of manuscript.

"Is that it?" he asked.

"Yes, that's it," replied Jacob.

"You seem very depressed about it," remarked the Vicar, and went over to the table and picked up the pile of foolscap. "What's the name of it?" he asked.

"I haven't found a title yet," replied Jacob. He was feeling very nervous. The Vicar was glancing at the first page of the manuscript. It was true that that page was one of the best, that Jacob did not fear criticism of the first chapter, but now that he saw the book in another person's hands, he wanted to snatch it away. He was ashamed of it.

"H'm!" said the Vicar, "that's not bad. I must read this. But what a dreadful hand you write, old chap."

"It ought to be typed of course . . ." began Jacob.

"Ah! I'll send it to poor little Florence. It'll be a nice job for her," remarked the Vicar.

"What does she charge?" asked Jacob.

"Oh, I'll see to that!" said the Vicar.

"It's awfully good of you," murmured Jacob. "I'm afraid it's hardly worth the expense."

"That depends," said Barker. "Is it written from the right point of view?"

"I think the moral is all right," replied Jacob, but he knew that it was not written from what the Vicar called the right point of view.

5.

The supper-party at "63" on Sunday evening was not of the usual type. Probably Fred Boyle, his father, and one or two other regular visitors from the immediate parish had been told to absent themselves on this special occasion.

Jacob had had no intimation of any departure from custom, and was surprised to find only three people in the dining-room when he went in.

He had sat near the poet in church, and had studied and admired him to the best of his ability.

Philip Laurence was certainly a man who compelled attention. He was only twenty-eight at this time, but already his great bulk evidenced signs of premature corpulence. Appraise him as high as his cheek bones, and you found the man consistent. The grossness of his body was in keeping with the heavy chin, the coarse jowl, and the big, thick-lipped mouth. So far you found the signs relevant, the man was a sensualist of a pronounced and unpleasant type — his very attitudes were in keeping; he slouched in his walk and lounged in his seat; this was essentially a man *à faire ses choux gras*. Then you raised your eyes to a contradiction that was startling. Instead of the low forehead and slightly protuberant, bovine eyes which you had a right to expect, you found that one little fraction of the man's physiology was that of the mystic; a forehead broad and high, that sloped back just perceptibly from the eyebrows, and eyes of that keen, pale steel-blue with an intensely black pupil, eyes which can burn with the fury of the fanatic. There was the whole biography of the man; a story of fierce and never-ceasing war. Optimists, such as Barker, and romanticists who prefer the sentiment of fairy-tale to the iron bitterness of true folk-lore always see the prospect of "conversion" in such a subject as Philip Laurence. They can read — as all can read — the signs of the battle; but they sentimentally postulate a victorious and a defeated personality, without taking into account that a victory for either side is the means for the conquered's recuperation. When Laurence's brain grew

dull and infertile after a period of clean living and close application, he could find no stimulus for it save by a concession to the brute in him. When the brute was tired by excess, it found rest and the means of recovery during the activity and temporary dominance of the spirit. Laurence was a cursed and unfortunate creature. If he had lived for the spirit he would have died in a madhouse; as it was, the brute gradually absorbed him.

Jacob was deeply stirred by the man's proximity to himself, for Laurence, like Barker, had a stimulating personality. During the sermon Jacob dreamed strange dreams. . . .

And when he found only Mrs. Latimer, Cairns, and Freda in the dining-room, and an unusually well-spread supper-table laid for no more than six persons, Jacob was extraordinarily pleased and excited. He had been dreading the monotony of Fred Boyle's platitudes; boycotted, perhaps, in the smaller room.

The Vicar and Laurence came in, three minutes after Jacob. There were no introductions, nor waste of time. The Vicar took his usual place at the head of the table, and signalled Jacob to the foot. Freda sat at the Vicar's left with her father next to her, and Laurence was on the Vicar's right.

Laurence ate heartily, almost greedily, and during supper the Vicar talked chiefly to Mrs. Latimer, whom he addressed as Margaret, in a vein of persiflage, twitting her on her laziness in not coming to St. Mark's, and telling her that she had no genius for doing the big thing; to which she replied with a very ready wit. Jacob thought that she distinctly scored on one or two occasions. He liked Mrs. Latimer; she had greeted him as a friend when he came into the room, with just the right spice of *camaraderie*.

It was not until supper was finished that Laurence took control of the conversation. He leaned back in his chair — Jacob was uneasy lest it should not be strong enough to endure the strain — lit a cigarette, inhaled and blew out a great cloud of smoke with an air of voluptuous enjoyment, and then picked up a quotation of Mrs. Latimer's, and used it as an opening for his own discourse.

"Oh! let us thank whatever gods there be that dead men rise up never," Mrs. Latimer had said in answer to a jibe of the Vicar's anent her responsibilities.

Laurence threw his disengaged hand over the back of the chair in which he was lounging. "Swinburne reached the great British public with that verse," he said. "The graceful melancholy and the pretty sentimentality of that 'weary river' should insure him popularity. Browning was afraid that his quality as poet in England would be remembered by his 'Ride from Ghent' and the 'Pied Piper.' I must ask Watts Dunton whether Swinburne hasn't the same feeling about his weariest river."

"But don't you think it is a very beautiful figure?" asked Mrs. Latimer.

"The idea of absorption into the sea is quite in keeping with the Swinburnian philosophy," said Laurence; "but I never yet watched a river and received an impression of weariness. Personally, too, I dislike the rhyme of river and ever, or never. One overlooks it in Burns and forgives it in Shelley, but I think it is a pity to continue its use — there is really no justification apart from precedent. It is so easy to make too much of precedent. I am essentially a modern. Swinburne wearies me with his exaggerated eulogies of the Elizabethans. Personally, I am not prostrate before Cyril Turnour, for instance."

Jacob had a flash of inspiration. He had read

Charles Lamb, and has once been led on to project a study of the Elizabethans. He had, however, gone no further than "The Revenger's Tragedy." That he had read twice, and he had decided at last that he supposed he must be too stupid to appreciate its beauty. The name of Cyril Turnour revived that submerged memory, and he ventured a hand in the conversation.

"I quite agree," he said, and blushed when Laurence turned to look at him. "I could never find out why that particular passage in the 'Revenger's Tragedy' should have moved Lamb to such emotion."

Laurence nodded. "Precisely," he said. "It is another instance of a sudden passion of adoration, but most of Lamb's writing is very poor stuff. It's another tradition. We just accept without examination, as we accept the Christ story, because we were taught it before we were old enough to understand."

"Yes," put in the Vicar, "and consequently miss the real point of the allegory."

Laurence smiled. "You're magnificent on allegories, Barker," he said, with a friendly smile. "Parable is your forte."

"Isn't all literature that is worth the name an allegory?" said Barker. "And all Art?"

"You can read an allegory into anything, if you try hard enough," put in Cairns.

"Smollett, for example?" suggested Barker.

"Why not?" said Laurence, getting in just before Cairns, who was also ready with an answer. "He wrote of life as he knew it. Isn't that motive the basis of all your allegories?"

Cairns nodded emphatically.

"Only the life of the spirit," said the Vicar.

"Oh well," returned Laurence, with a faint look

of boredom, "some kind of spirit must animate all living matter."

Barker had not missed Laurence's change of temper. "Pagan and pantheist," he said, "and you say you are essentially a modern."

"Oh, modernity is only a revival of ideas our grandfathers had forgotten," returned Laurence carelessly. "Most of our science, all that is worth knowing, was probably familiar to the Egyptians."

"It is a pity we can't find someone to revive the ethics of Christ," said the Vicar, unable to resist the temptation.

"They've been staled by the theologians," returned Laurence. "If they could be forgotten for five hundred years, they might have quite a vogue when they were revived."

Jacob had been listening to the conversation with absorbed attention. He thought it all immensely clever. But this last shaft made him uncomfortable. He had never heard the Vicar countered in this fashion. Mrs. Latimer, also, seemed to think that Laurence had gone too far. "We've got a long way from the Elizabethans," she put in quickly.

"Yes, and I'm a long way from home," replied Laurence, rising clumsily to his feet and knocking his chair over. He made no attempt to recover it, but pushed it aside with his foot. "Are you coming my way?" he asked Cairns.

"We go from Baker Street," said Freda. It was her first contribution to the conversation. Jacob noticed that she looked at Laurence with evident admiration; and that the look was now returned with interest. Jacob inwardly wilted. He admired Laurence from an intellectual standpoint, but he did not wish Freda to exceed this tribute. "I suppose he is very attractive to women," thought Jacob.

"Baker Street is good enough for me," replied Laurence. "Shall we go together?"

The Vicar went out with the other three, and took Freda upstairs, leaving Cairns and Laurence to talk on the door-step.

"I don't like that man," said Mrs. Latimer to Jacob, when they were alone.

"He's tremendously clever, of course," said Jacob.

"Don't you find something repulsive about him?"

"M — yes. I know what you mean."

"And that silly little girl over there is going to fall in love with him." Mrs. Latimer indicated the seat lately occupied by Freda.

"I don't think she's really silly," remonstrated Jacob.

"Silly enough for that, I'm afraid," said Mrs. Latimer. "However, we must leave that to the Vicar. He'll know when to interfere. How's your novel getting on?"

"It's finished," replied Jacob. "The Vicar's having it typed for me."

"May I read it?"

"Oh, it isn't worth it, really," said Jacob. "I mean it's awfully good of you to want to see it, but . . ."

Mrs. Latimer smiled. "You're far too modest," she said. "Take example from Mr. Laurence."

"I would if I were as brilliant as he is," replied Jacob.

"Pooh! He's not going to make any mark," said Mrs. Latimer, with conviction. "He's got personality, and he's been made a celebrity, assiduously log-rolled."

Jacob wondered how people knew all these things. He felt that he was lamentably ignorant. "But he's written some good stuff," he ventured.

"There's a certain vigour about it, that goes," replied Mrs. Latimer. "But I want you to tell me something about your own work."

"There's nothing to tell," said Jacob simply.

"Oh, you're incorrigible!"

"Indeed, I'm not!" he protested.

"Well, will you let me judge for myself?" said Mrs. Latimer. "Will you come and see me, and bring that novel?"

"I should like to, immensely," said Jacob. He was flattered. It was so unusual for anyone to take an interest in him. He had always been snubbed as far as his literary ambitions were concerned.

"I'm afraid it can't be till the end of September," said Mrs. Latimer. "I'm going away for a fortnight. Shall I write to you here and let you know when I come back?"

"If you will. Yes, please do. I should like to come," said Jacob.

"I shan't forget," replied Mrs. Latimer, as the Vicar returned.

Jacob went to bed with the feeling that he had a new zest in life. Mrs. Latimer was an interesting woman who was evidently well posted in literary affairs and literary criticism. He thought of his story of the man who had pined for love. "I'm very like that man in some ways," he reflected. "I *do* want encouragement. I want someone to take a personal interest in me. The Vicar's a splendid chap, and he's been awfully good to me, but he has so many other interests."

He looked forward to seeing Mrs. Latimer again, with unqualified pleasure.

CHAPTER VIII

BARKER *v.* STAHL

1.

CECIL BARKER'S interest in Jacob Stahl waned very rapidly during September; as an interest it had been feeble from the beginning. To Barker, as a gambler, Jacob was a spade declaration; to Barker, as a fisherman, Jacob was a small eel that had fouled his line, that could not be landed without peculiar attention and the exercise of extraordinary patience, and, most finally and determinatively, that was not worth the trouble. So, in the case of big fish Woodhouse, the Vicar determined to snap his cast and let the hooked quarry go free. But in this case he could not turn him adrift without fulfilling his promise to find Jacob a job.

Cecil Barker's scope in this direction was almost unlimited. He had such curious spheres of influence, he knew so many people who were willing to serve him. There was, for instance, Harold Gray, Cairns's solicitor, an honest lawyer with a large and varied practice, and a predisposition for good works; a rare type, but still a type. To Gray, Barker appeared as a saint.

Gray, with professional readiness, grasped the commercial possibilities of Jacob Stahl's qualifications as outlined, not too generously, by Barker — the man was honest enough when he was not fishing.

"There are great possibilities in advertisement-writing," said Gray. "The so-called literary adver-

tisement is gaining ground. If Stahl would be content to accept a small salary to start with, I think I could get him a position with a firm of advertising agents, clients of mine, Fletcher & Hill. I will sound them if you think your protégé would take the post. I dare say they'll give him two or three pounds a week. You say he has some literary ability?"

"He'll have to take it," returned Barker. "Yes, he has some literary ability. He's written a novel. I haven't read it. You're a dear, good fellow, Gray. I wish we could meet more often."

The announcement of this prospective employment came to Jacob as a shock. In as far as he had considered the subject of his future at all, he had pictured himself continuing his present work — it did not occupy too much time — indefinitely, while he persisted in his literary endeavours until he achieved some form of success. He had some idea that Mrs. Latimer was to help him in this ambition. He did not, therefore, greet the announcement with the enthusiasm he might have shown.

"I've never tried to write advertisements," he said hesitatingly.

"My dear Stahl," replied the Vicar, "don't you think it is time you tried to do something?"

"Of course, I shall try," said Jacob, a little petulant — he felt that he had not earned the rebuke — "it was only that I doubted my ability."

"I'm afraid you're very indolent," was the Vicar's comment.

After fulfilling all the requirements of his secretarial duties and writing a complete novel, Jacob was resentful. "Do you think I have been wasting any time lately?" he asked.

"You have no energy, no force of character," said the Vicar. "You'll do the thing that is put before

you, but you never make work for yourself. You are always dreaming of achievement, but do nothing to reach it. You haven't read half a dozen books since you've been here."

Jacob recognized a brilliant vein of truth in this description of himself, and it subdued him. "I don't know what's the matter with me," he said irritably.

"Lack of purpose," returned the Vicar briefly. "By the way, the typescript of your novel has come back. You'd better send it to a publisher."

"You haven't read it, of course," faltered Jacob. He hoped for a negative, and was disappointed when his hope was fulfilled.

"I didn't want him to read it," was the thought in his mind, "but I think he might have done it. It shows how much real interest he takes in my work." And then he reproached himself for his ingratitude. After all, the Vicar had done more than anyone else would have done, and yet . . .

Curiously enough, it was so often that "and yet . . ." which left the last impression. Barker's cases found it difficult to define that ultimate failure of the saint; the thing which remained when the good works were forgotten. It may be that Barker roused too high an expectation. His interest in you, his wonderful acts of self-sacrificing kindness undertaken on your behalf, his charm of manner, his method of making you believe that you were a person worthy of peculiar consideration — these things either inflated your personal vanity, or, if you were more discriminating, less a slave to your own egotism, evoked a feeling of admiration for so fine an ideal. Then, when the break came, when the Vicar had either tired of your newly discovered virtue or despaired of your conversion, when he had found some later and therefore more engaging object of attention, the re-

action was too great. If personal vanity was the dominant factor you were piqued, wounded; if you were ruled by stronger motives, you regretted that Barker had failed to maintain his original splendid attitude. That was the inevitable outcome of it all; the saint had failed in some particular. If he had been indeed a saint, he should never have lost interest. New interests might, and would, have absorbed him, but not to the detriment of the old. There should have been examples in which the new interest gave way to the old. But such examples were unknown in the annals of 63.

Jacob Stahl was not ruled by any petty vanity. At first he resented the Vicar's change of attitude, but he ended by excusing it. "The Vicar has so many other interests," thought Jacob, "why should he ever have taken so much trouble over me?" Nevertheless, that "and yet . . ." was dominant in Jacob's mind when he left Acacia Avenue. Barker had lost his saintship once again.

2.

His departure was a little hurried at the last.

Two days after the Vicar's interview with Gray, a letter came from the solicitor to the effect that Fletcher & Hill would see Mr. Stahl if he would call at their offices in Norfolk Street one day between three and four o'clock. The Vicar passed the letter over to Jacob, who, anxious to please, said that he would go that afternoon.

"It would be as well for you to understand," remarked the Vicar, "that I'm afraid I shan't be able to do anything more for you if you fail to get this appointment."

"I shall do my best," said Jacob. He did not at

the time understand the full significance of the remark; he thought that the Vicar was emphasizing the necessity for zeal, even to the extent of holding a threat over the head of his inferentially indolent secretary.

Jacob was feeling distinctly nervous when he reached the third floor of the big building in Norfolk Street. The statement of his name and business, the display of Mr. Gray's letter, seemed to make little impression on the small boy who sat behind the pigeon-hole of a glazed screen, labelled "Enquiries."

He was more nervous still when he sat on a chair at the end of a long room filled with an intricate arrangement of counters and American roll-top desks, awaiting the pleasure of Mr. Fletcher or Mr. Hill.

His nervousness was largely due to the growing consciousness of his own ignorance. On the top of the omnibus which had brought him from King's Cross, he had thought out the subject of advertisement-writing to his own satisfaction. He had studied such posters as had been visible, and had come to the conclusion that the main thing was to put oneself in the position of the buyer and to consider what was the sort of inducement which would tempt one to buy some particular soap, or tea, or beef-essence. He had to admit that none of the specimens of advertising he could remember, had ever induced him to go out and buy, but, obviously advertising did pay; it might be that one addressed a different class. He thought that he could, at least, better the wording of much of the advertisement-writing he had seen.

But here in this crowded, busy room, full of strange objects and unknown energies, he felt doubtful of his easily drawn inferences. The atmosphere of the place seemed to suggest a difficult and complicated business, conducted at high pressure.

He had been there for more than half an hour before a short, fair, rather stout young man, with curly hair already thin at the crown, came out from one of the smaller offices that led directly out of the large room. He sauntered down between the desks with an air of familiar ease, paused for a moment to say "Hello, Bodger!" (he said it with a facetious air, and pronounced the name *Bojjer*, with emphasis on the first syllable) to a dark, clumsy-looking youth seated at one of the American desks, and finally leaned his elbows on the counter which ran across the end of the room and looked at Jacob.

Jacob smiled politely, and looked expectant.

"Mr. Stahl?" inquired the fair young man.

"Yes; my name's Stahl," returned Jacob. "I'm waiting to see Mr. Fletcher or Mr. Hill."

"Got an appointment?"

Jacob produced his letter again, and the young man took it and read it attentively. "Mr. Fletcher 'll be disengaged directly," he remarked. "Been at this game long?"

"No, not very long," prevaricated Jacob. He saw no reason why he should display his ignorance to this rather ill-mannered underling.

"What's your line — copy?" was the next question of his examination.

Jacob guessed at the meaning of the word. "Yes," he said, rather shortly.

"Thought so!" said the fair young man, as if congratulating himself on his own shrewdness; and Jacob wondered how many different forms of activity there were in this business. "I've been doing most of the copy up to now; you'll be under me if you get the job. You a college josser?"

Jacob felt that a slight change of attitude was necessary. This, evidently, was a comparatively im-

portant person, who could write English if he couldn't speak it, and expert in his own business, and therefore worthy of respect; but for the life of him, Jacob could not guess the import of that last question.

"A college josser?" he repeated, with a look of inquiry.

"Thought you were probably one of those Oxford or Cambridge beggars," explained the young man familiarly. "We're going in for style on one side now."

"Oh! No; I'm — I've never been to the University," said Jacob. He had begun to say "I'm not a 'Varsity man," but he judged that statement to have a suggestion of "side," which he thought it better to avoid.

The young man at the counter grinned, but before he had time to ask any further questions, a man of between thirty and forty came out from an office at the far end of the room, and called out "Mr. Farmer," in a voice which made itself heard over the many other noises which nearly always resounded through that room.

"Yessir!" replied the fair young man, turning quickly.

"Bring Mr. Stahl right in," shouted the other man.

"Yessir," said Mr. Farmer, and to Jacob: "Come on. Here's your letter. This way." He indicated a lift-up flap at the end of the counter, but as it was weighted down at the moment by a heavy parcel of "stereos," he added: "Get under, it's quicker."

Jacob "got under," not a very dignified proceeding, and followed Mr. Farmer up the room.

The man who had shouted — Jacob learned that it was Mr. Hill — was seated at a huge roll-top desk,

littered with a confusion of proofs, blocks and papers.

"Mr. Stahl?" he said, when Farmer had left the room.

"Yes," replied Jacob. He was uncertain whether he should have said "sir"; he tried to put as much of courteous deference as he could into the monosyllable.

"Mr. Gray says you haven't done any advertisin' copy," said Mr. Hill, "but you figure to turn your hand to it. Is that so?"

"Yes, that is so," replied Jacob.

"Now what sort of literary work have you been doing?" asked Mr. Hill.

"I have been writing short stories, chiefly," replied Jacob.

"Have you got any specimens with you?"

"No, I'm afraid I haven't," apologized Jacob. "I didn't know . . ."

"It's of no consequence," interrupted Mr. Hill. "Suppose you just tell me why you think you can write advertisin' copy, and what's your attitude generally towards advertisement."

This was something of a poser. Jacob hesitated. Mr. Hill used a tooth-pick without dissimulation, and that act gave Jacob heart. Why should he be afraid of this vulgarian?

"I suppose writing advertisements," he suggested, "is a matter that any intelligent man who understands the use of English can soon master. Isn't it a question of putting yourself in the place of the buyer and considering what would induce oneself to buy the article advertised?"

"Why, no!" said Mr. Hill, "advertisement is just salesmanship. The writer of good copy is a good salesman. He goes right out with a straight talk to sell the goods. He don't stop to consider what peo-

ple are thinking, he just wades right in and pushes the stuff on to them."

Jacob made a picture of this method in his mind, and detected a flaw in it. He saw himself wading right in on a good straight talk, and at the same time saw his desired victim look at him with a stony stare and pass him by.

"Yes," he said, "that's all right, but you've got to make your public listen first. You've got to hold their attention."

"That's so," replied Mr. Hill, with the first hint of approval he had shown, "you've got to hit 'em between the eyes first. But that's where you Britishers stop, that's where you're behind the times. You put up a mighty fine poster, f'rinstance, and people look at it, and think it's very elegant — go up town and forget it. What the advertisin' agent's got to do is to make these people put their hand in their pocket, and do it right now before they find time to forget it."

"Oh, precisely!" said Jacob; "I quite see the point." He paused a moment and then added: "I feel certain that I could soon learn the knack of it."

"There's no certainty about it," said Mr. Hill, returning to the use of his toothpick. "Good copywriters are born, not made, and there's mighty few of 'em around. However, I'll talk to Mr. Fletcher — he's up town just now — and mail you our decision. You'd better leave your address with the boy."

In the outer room Jacob met Mr. Farmer smoking a very stout bulldog pipe. By way of being pleasant, Jacob said: "Oh, are you allowed to smoke here? That's rather jolly." Mr. Farmer winked at Bodger. "Awfully beastly jolly," he remarked. Bodger grinned and stared.

Two things impressed Jacob as the outcome of that first sight of the world of advertising. The first was that if this business were a fair sample, he was making a descent in the social scale. The second that Mr. Hill seemed to regard advertising as a matter of surpassing importance; that advertising was to him what the life of self-sacrifice was to Cecil Barker. Good copy-writers were born, not made. A good copy-writer to Mr. Hill was, without doubt, a far more glorious creature than a poet. Jacob wondered what the Vicar would make of Mr. Hill or Mr. Farmer. He took a pleasure in contemplating the singular contrast between the motive of the world he was leaving and that of the world into which he might be about to enter. He wondered whether either motive was intrinsically right or wrong. He felt curiously refreshed by his sight of the business world. For eight weeks he had been living in an atmosphere which, seen now from the outside, suddenly appeared as hopelessly depressing.

He went into a shop in the Strand and had tea. He was not looking forward to his return to Acacia Avenue. He hoped that the firm might risk the experiment of engaging him. They were all hopeless bounders, of course, but it would be experience, and he would be free from restraint out of office hours. Lastly, it would be nice to be earning something again. He wondered what salary they would offer. Thirty shillings a week? Well, he could live on that for a month or two.

3.

The Vicar was out when Jacob got back, and Willis volunteered the information that his master "would not be home for dinner."

"Oh!" said Jacob. "Well, you can get me something, I suppose?"

"You can 'ave a hegg," returned Willis stonily.

"Oh, curse your infernal eggs!" said Jacob.

"There's nothink else in the 'ouse," replied Willis, fixing Jacob with a glassy stare.

"Oh, well, give me bread and butter and jam, if there is any," said Jacob, with a shrug of his shoulders. He thanked goodness — the spirit he sought, but had thus far failed to recognize — that he would soon be rid of Willis.

When the Vicar returned at half-past ten, Jacob expressed some enthusiasm about the prospects of an engagement with Messrs. Fletcher & Hill. The Vicar did not appear so sanguine.

"That's the usual excuse," he remarked, "to say that they will write to you." The Vicar looked thoughtful and rather depressed.

Two mornings later, however, an envelope appeared on the breakfast-table, addressed to Mr. Stahl, bearing on its face a very distinct intimation of the nature of Messrs. Fletcher & Hill's business. That envelope was a sample of good advertising copy as it appealed to the firm which issued it. Jacob paused even in his eagerness to learn the contents of the letter to admire the "snappiness" of the phrase "We sell the goods." That was what Mr. Hill would call "straight talk," no doubt.

The contents of the letter were eminently satisfactory. Whether it were due to Mr. Gray's influence or to Mr. Hill's flair for a prospective writer of good copy, the firm had written to offer Mr. Stahl a month's trial at the salary of ten pounds a month. It was more than Jacob had dared to hope. The engagement was to begin on Monday, and this was Saturday.

Jacob's face glowed as he handed the letter to the Vicar a few minutes later. He was full of gratitude at that moment for the Vicar's kindness in having used his powerful influence. "I'm awfully grateful to you," said Jacob.

"Are you going to make the best use of your opportunities?" asked the Vicar.

"Do you mean, shall I stick to advertising?" said Jacob.

"Is that all you've learnt here?" replied the Vicar.

Jacob was puzzled, set aback. He had blundered again in some way. He had thought that this engagement would please Barker.

"Of course not," he said. "I'm tremendously in your debt in many ways. I've learnt . . ."

"Are you going to carry what you've learnt into your new life?" asked the Vicar.

Jacob thought of Mr. Hill and Farmer. He pictured himself preaching to them of the beauties of self-sacrifice, and knew the thing was utterly impossible. He was too honest to make any vain protestations. "I'm afraid it will be difficult," he said.

"Love is strong enough to overcome any difficulty. Isn't that true, my dear fellow?"

Jacob had no answer to this aphorism. It was absurd to think of loving Hill or Farmer — they wouldn't like it.

The Vicar's mouth was twisted into that expression of thoughtful disapproval which was so curiously damning. Jacob felt a worm.

"I'm afraid your ideal is too high for me," he said at last.

"So weak?" was the Vicar's only comment.

This was at breakfast. When the morning's letters had been dealt with — the correspondence had resumed its normal proportions again — the Vicar said:

"Could you make it convenient to leave to-day, Stahl? I'm afraid it's quite useless your staying on here."

Jacob was thunderstruck. He had thirteen shillings and ninepence remaining out of his three pounds, and that represented the total of his assets.

He stammered. "I — yes — of course, I could . . ." and then stopped.

"I suppose you will take a room somewhere," said the Vicar. "If you'll send me your address, I'll have your letters forwarded."

Jacob stood up, looking very hot and uncomfortable. "I suppose I must," he said; "but it's a little difficult. I've only got about fourteen shillings in the world, and I don't suppose I shall get anything from Fletcher & Hill till the end of the month."

"Oh, my dear fellow!" said Barker in a tone of profound reproof; "you've had four pounds from me in eight weeks, instead of the two I promised, and I have an account for another four pounds here for your typewriting. I hoped you would be able to repay that now."

Cecil Barker was a man of extraordinary generosity. He gave away money freely without a thought, and periodically it became necessary to reduce his private capital in order to meet the demands made upon him, demands which he usually met with careless liberality. But when these occasions of necessity for the sale of stock arose, and he was forced to contemplate the dwindling of his private income, he had brief periods of reaction. Jacob had been unlucky enough to stumble upon one of these periods. Cecil Barker had spent more money than he intended during his month's holiday in Norway with Philip Laurence.

Jacob sighed. "I will as soon as I can," he said. "It's just at the present moment . . ."

"Haven't you any relations?" asked the Vicar.

"I've one brother," said Jacob, "but I couldn't go to him."

"Why not?"

"There has never been much sympathy between us. I haven't seen him for about two years." Jacob was still standing, he was between the big writing-table and the window. His face was in shadow. The Vicar, from his seat by the table, looked full at him. "I had better write to your brother," said the Vicar.

Jacob turned and looked out of the window. He had meant to avoid an appeal to his brother Eric at all costs. That Eric would lend him money, Jacob had no doubt. But before that loan was forthcoming there would be tedious, impossible explanations to be made. What had Jacob done with that patrimony of over four thousand pounds, which had been his portion, while Eric had sought success — and won it — on a sum of five hundred pounds? Eric, the elder brother, had been less favoured in his father's will because he had ability to succeed. Jacob, the failure — had he not been a failure from his birth? — had squandered the provision made for him. He saw the line of cross-questioning with repulsive clearness. Eric the confident, the capable, the accurate; how easy it was to foretell his line of action. That vein of shrewdness in him would prompt terms for the loan, in order to restrain these extravagant propensities of his younger brother. . . .

Yet Jacob, remembering his struggles in that over-large house in Bloomsbury Square, could find excuses for himself. It had not been all his fault. He had been weak, he had given in too easily to his wife, but his weakness had been a form of pity. He had believed her a grossly treated and long-suffering woman. . . .

How could one explain these things to the precise, able Eric, who had won for himself a safe place in the Home Office, an accepted authority on economics, whose only failing was that he had been so academical that he had overlooked the study of men? Eric never could, never would, understand. It was on this suggestion that Jacob turned to give his ultimatum.

The Vicar was writing a letter.

Jacob did not wait for him to finish it. "My brother can never be made to understand . . ." he began.

The Vicar interrupted him. "I'm writing to your brother," he said, without looking up. "You must understand that I am unable to help you further financially. You can decide for yourself whether or not I shall send this letter."

Jacob set his teeth hard to restrain an outbreak of bitterness. He compelled himself to remember all that Cecil Barker had done for him. Jacob reminded himself that he owed first a debt of gratitude; when that was paid it would be time enough for recrimination.

The Vicar blotted his letter, passed it across the table, and began another without a word. Jacob picked up the letter and read it.

"*Dear Sir,*

"Your brother, J. L. Stahl, has been acting as my secretary for the past two months, and I have now found him a post with a firm of advertising agents at a salary of ten pounds a month. He is at the present moment, however, practically destitute, and I regret that I am not able to assist him further with any money loans. I have up to the present lent him six pounds, which you will, no doubt, see your way to repay me.

"I should certainly have written to you before this, but I learned, five minutes ago, for the first time, that he had any relations living, and it is worth noting that your brother was very unwilling that I should write to you. You may, or may not, be a believer in Christ, but I presume you are, in any case, a believer in brotherly love.

"Yours faithfully,
"CECIL BARKER."

"Will you give me the address?" said the Vicar, when Jacob had finished. He pushed an envelope across the table.

"I would sooner that you addressed it," returned Jacob. "If it must go, I should prefer him to think I had no hand in it."

The Vicar picked up the envelope without a word, and looked coldly up at Jacob, who dictated his brother's address in Putney.

Cecil Barker was as resolute in his cruelty as in his love. When, in his opinion, a brutal attitude was necessary, he never faltered, he maintained it with the same resistless force that he brought to his acts of love and self-sacrifice.

4.

At twelve o'clock the Vicar came downstairs.

"You needn't bother any more with these letters," he said to Jacob. "You'd better go out and look for rooms. If you are not going back to Liverpool Street, you might try Mrs. Woolmer's at 191, Bailey Street, just off Euston Square. It's not a very aristocratic neighbourhood, but I know her rooms are clean and very cheap. Smiler can take your bags round on a hand truck. Don't give him anything.

You'd better take another sovereign till I hear from your brother." The Vicar laid a sovereign on the table.

Jacob looked up. "Don't think I'm not grateful," he said, "though you are making it hard enough for me now. But let me ask you one question: 'What have I done?' If I'd robbed and libelled you, you could hardly treat me more like a criminal."

"I've no time for the dilettantes, that's all," returned Barker. "There's so much more important work for me to do. I have no quarrel with you. I dare say you may make some sort of success in life, in your own half-hearted way."

Truly, the man was honest when he was not fishing. He had fine qualities. He could beget love for himself in the mind of man or woman; and he could reject it without compunction when offered — a far harder thing. He was a true ascetic, living in the world and laying up for himself neither treasure nor the admiration of the many. He might certainly have been a Bishop, had he desired; he would have made an excellent Prime Minister, able to hold factions together by the force of his personality, able to fight an opponent remorselessly, able to initiate and carry through a daring policy. He was only selfish in the rigour of his self-denial; as detached from the small interests and concerns of life as a Yogi, developing his own personality at the cost of human sympathy. He worked by love and the profession of love among smaller personalities, yet it is hard to believe that love was what he sought at last. He was a superman who worked for no rewards here, and none ever heard him speak of any hope of reward hereafter. His eschatology was written in some sealed book that he never opened. His was a personality to command admiration and compel love. Even those who — like

Jacob Stahl — suffered bitterly at his hands, still remembered him in after-years with admiration and love.

5.

Jacob obtained rooms at Mrs. Woolmer's. They were, as the Vicar had said, passably clean, and he would rather have faced the workhouse than those "large insects" at Mrs. Pentecoste's.

He had taken one small room at the top of the house which looked out over the desert of small houses in the parish of St. Pancras. The price was seven shillings a week, three shillings less than he had paid in Liverpool Street. He calculated that he ought to save money when he was earning his ten pounds a month.

He bought a cheap packet of stationery, and sent his address to the Vicar, and wrote to Messrs. Fletcher & Hill, accepting the terms of their offer.

He was bitter against Barker, but he was not unduly depressed.

He was learning more of life, gaining new experience — the things he chiefly loved.

BOOK TWO

MRS. LATIMER

BOOK TWO

MRS. LATIMER

CHAPTER IX

WASHINGTON HOUSE

1.

George P. Hill was one of the pioneers of modern advertising in England. He was one of those clever men who are not quite brilliant enough to make a big fortune in the States, and coming to England, succeed or fail according to their powers of adaptability. George P. Hill was clever enough to be adaptable within limits, and he came to London just when England was ripe for development. The half-tone process was still expensive, but it was accepted as a method that had come to stay. Mr. Hill's American training had taught him that that process was going to revolutionize advertising.

He found clay for his moulding in the business of Andrew Fletcher. Fletcher had a well-established connection, and he would probably have refused Mr. Hill's offer of capital and new blood, had it not been that Fletcher's clients were beginning to demand from him that which he was unable to supply. It had been a terrible shock to Fletcher when he was first asked to supply "ideas." He had none in stock, he had never dealt in that commodity, he had thought ideas were no part of an advertising agent's business. He bought "space" at special rates, and sold it at

a ten per cent. profit, speculated in posting stations, and generally acted as a specialist in conducting the technicalities of advertising; he was the same sort of middleman as a conveyancing lawyer; he gave advice on conduct, not on inception.

Then George P. Hill appeared with a letter of introduction. He came to talk, and he opened Andrew Fletcher's eyes to the possibilities that were in store for the evolutionary advertising agent. "A service" was what was required according to Mr. Hill, a really capable service with black and white artists on the premises, and writers of brisk, snappy copy; Mr. Hill would supply the ideas. He had hundreds of ideas, all fresh from the States, ideas which had not yet startled the readers of English advertisement.

Mr. Fletcher was impressed at that first interview, but he was of opinion that there was "too much gas about this Yankee." At the second interview, however, Mr. Fletcher was called upon to do the talking; his visitor seemed to have developed an inordinate curiosity as to the methods of English advertising. Fletcher was put on his mettle; in honour of his "good old British methods," he had to show that there was money in them. He gave, from memory, a few figures about his best "accounts."

The third interview was not until a week later. In the meantime it may be inferred that the American had made inquiries with the object of checking some of Mr. Fletcher's boasts of good accounts. At that interview George P. Hill proposed a partnership and suggested that the Fletcher advertising agency should be run on new lines. He had one splendid argument, a capital of twenty-five thousand dollars. He let those "dollars talk."

Andrew Fletcher wanted a month for consideration; he wanted to think it over, and he wanted to

consult his solicitor, but Mr. Hill told him that the offer only held good for three days; he'd given Fletcher the first chance, but he wasn't going to fool around for a month; he saw his opportunity in England, and he wanted to begin "right now."

Fletcher consulted his solicitor at once. Harold Gray gave him excellent advice, and within a week a deed of partnership had been drafted. Hill annotated the draft freely, but the signed deed incorporated all the essentials that Fletcher and Gray desired. Hill "thought big"; he wanted to get to grips with his "proposition"; as long as he were not too hampered in his present policy, he did not care greatly whether in the unthinkable event of failure, he had no security for his capital.

So the firm "Andrew Fletcher" of Tudor Street went out of existence, and was succeeded by "Fletcher & Hill," of Washington House, Norfolk Street. Hill thought the name a good omen; he, too, was a gambler and superstitious in small things.

2.

The day after Jacob left Acacia Avenue, his luck turned. Thinking over his financial problem and speculating as to the probability of his brother's generosity, he was suddenly struck by the recollection that the tenant of his house in Bloomsbury Square, a certain Mr. Lee-Perry, had no address to which to forward the rent. That rent, unhappily, was not profit to himself, but it was very necessary in order to pay the long lease-holder, the Queen's taxes when they became due, and various other little expenses that accumulate to the householder, accumulations which in Jacob's case ate up the rent at which he had let the house furnished. On Sunday afternoon he decided

that he might as well pay a friendly call on his tenant; it would pass the time.

He found that Mr. Lee-Perry was succeeding as an architect in the house where he himself had failed; was getting more work than he could personally attend to; was, lastly and most pertinently, willing to take the remainder of the lease off Jacob's hands, and buy the furniture at a valuation.

"Oh, why bother about paying a valuer?" asked Jacob. "Can't we arrange a figure between us?"

"Well? Of course! We *could* . . ." said the successful architect, standing on the hearthrug with his hands in his coat-pockets, and gently giving at the knees and straightening them again. "We could, you know! Only . . . How?" He said it brightly, with an air of having said something amusing.

"Well, what do you think?" replied Jacob. "I really hardly know what it's worth, but I'm willing to accept your estimate."

Lee-Perry looked round the room and smiled at the various objects of furniture. "Know what it cost?" he asked.

"About two hundred and fifty pounds, altogether," said Jacob.

Lee-Perry blinked and went on a tour of inspection; he walked with a little springy jump. Jacob thought that there was something birdlike about him.

"Top-floor not furnished," said Lee-Perry after he had quizzed various of the pieces in the drawing-room with his head on one side.

"The fittings in the office were rather expensive," said Jacob.

"Yes, very nice. Have some tea?"

"Thanks," said Jacob, and during tea they discussed architecture.

After tea there was a brief silence, which Lee-Perry broke by saying abruptly: "Not more than half."

For a moment Jacob failed to understand. "What isn't?" he asked.

Lee-Perry jumped to his feet again — he never seemed able to keep still for many minutes — and began to reinvestigate the drawing-room suite.

"Oh, you mean for the furniture," said Jacob. "Did you mean you'd give one hundred and twenty-five pounds?"

"Not more," said the other. "Nothing on the third floor."

"I think it's too much," said Jacob, with a thumping heart, mentally he had thought fifty, or at the most seventy-five pounds, was all he could expect.

"Oh, I say!" said Lee-Perry, "I'm afraid you're not business-like." He laughed and looked at Jacob, with his head very much on one side. "More am I," he added, and laughed again.

"How jolly!" said Jacob.

They settled up the affair then and there. Jacob came away with a cheque for one hundred and twenty-five pounds in his pocket. It had been agreed that the half-year's rent should be kept by Lee-Perry to pay the landlord and such other calls as would become due. "Leave it all to me," he said. He seemed willing enough to take all the onus of settling affairs. Jacob volunteered the statement that his signature could always be obtained to such documents as the transfer of the lease. He gave his address as care of Fletcher & Hill.

He came away tremendously happy and elated. He could pay the Vicar at once; he could change to more comfortable rooms; he could buy some new clothes and boots, matters that were becoming

pressing. He was, in fact, once more a man of means. The future looked very bright.

A very decent chap, Lee-Perry. He had asked Jacob to come in and see him sometimes. Jacob had promised that he would.

3.

Jacob went to his new offices on Monday morning full of vigour and initiative. Instead of a feeling of depression and failure, a sense of being crushed under a great weight of worry which he had no power to raise, he had the knowledge that he was a free man, able to face the future with a light heart. He was under no necessity to cringe to his brother; he was relieved of the burden which had been bound upon him by the Vicar; he need not plan and scrape to keep going until he drew a partially mortgaged month's salary; he was not oppressed by the horror of failing boots which he had no means to replace. These things to Jacob Stahl were insuperable handicaps. He could not fight them collectively. They deadened his imagination, made work abhorrent to him, killed his initiative. With one hundred and twenty-five pounds he was able to buy a measure of freedom, that rarest of all commodities.

He thought it well to be early on his first morning, and arrived at Washington House at twenty minutes past nine. He was surprised to find that work was already in full swing. When Mr. Hill had remodelled the business, he had raised certain salaries and lengthened the office day. Fletcher's British 10 to 5.30 was Americanized into 9 to 6.

Jacob was shown into Mr. Hill's private office. Mr. Hill gave him a nod. "We start at 9 a. m.," he said. "We have to hustle in this business. Now I'll

have Mr. Farmer put you wise, right away." He rose and led the way.

Jacob followed Mr. Hill, and they discovered Farmer in a little loose box with two American desks in it — there was just room for two — at one of which he was seated smoking his bulldog pipe. As far as Jacob could judge, that was all Farmer was doing at that moment.

"Now, Mr. Stahl can sure work in here with you," said Hill. "He can use this desk. You can try him with some of the copy for that cocoa scheme."

"Sure," replied Farmer laconically, and Mr. Hill went out, apparently satisfied.

"Done any cocoa copy?" Farmer asked, when he and Jacob were alone.

Jacob thought it wise to be honest this morning. He was not there under false pretences; he had admittedly come to learn the business; above all, he had a cheque for one hundred and twenty-five pounds in his pocket. He was independent. What did he care for Farmer?

"I've never written any copy," he said with a smile. "And, as a matter of fact, I know nothing whatever yet about advertising. But Mr. Hill said that you would 'put me wise right away,' whatever that may imply."

"Blimey!" remarked Farmer, without emotion. "Are you paying a premium?"

"No, I'm getting a salary," replied Jacob.

"George P. don't half chuck it about," commented Farmer. He sucked solemnly at his pipe, and stared at the pigeon-holes in his desk.

"Can you give me anything to do?" asked Jacob, after a pause.

Mr. Farmer reached up and took a large brown paper portfolio from the top of his desk. He handed

this over to Jacob. "All the rough idea for the cocoa scheme is in there," he remarked. "You'd better go through it. I'm trying to think of a phrase. Don't talk."

Jacob opened his desk, not without a little difficulty — it was the first time he had tackled an American roll-top — and set himself to wrestle with the cocoa scheme.

It was Greek to him at first. There was a confusion of papers, some typewritten, others in various handwritings. These were apparently in some kind of order, and a few of the typewritten papers had headings to indicate their purpose, such as "Prelim. notice to the Trade," "1st Circ.," "1st follow-up." These all appeared to be personal letters; they began "Dear Sir." The "Prelim. notice to the Trade" ran as follows:

"*Dear Sir,*

"We are immediately putting upon the market a new line to be known as —— Cocoa, which we intend to advertise widely, and as we feel sure that it would be to your interest to push this article in view of the undoubtedly large sale which it will shortly command, we would advise you to take advantage of the special preliminary terms we are offering to those who order in advance. Enclosed find slip, for your private instruction only, giving special trade prices, together with a note of the prices at which —— Cocoa will be advertised, and which will be the lowest at which we shall permit any retail offer."

Jacob saw room for improvement in the English of this letter, and made a pencil note as to the excess of "which's."

By degrees he began to apprehend the fact that

cocoa-manufacturers, for instance, do not conduct a retail business, and that their immediate customers are not the general public but the trade. He had never given this curious fact any attention before, had never paused to consider how the detail of trade was conducted. But he was sharp enough to draw a correct inference, namely, that one advertised in order to help the grocer.

It became clear to him now why those advertisements he had studied on the 'bus had never induced him to rush into the nearest shop and buy. They were not addressed to him, but to the housewife, who was compelled to go frequently into grocers' shops. These advertisements served by reiteration to impress a name on the housewife's mind. When the young assistant paused in taking an order for Tom's Soap, and remarked casually, as he wetted his pencil, that Dick's Soap was a nice article, and they were selling a lot of it just now, the housewife could not say, "Oh, I've never heard of it!" She had to admit that she had "seen it advertised," and so give the young grocer his opportunity to push Dick's Soap; upon which it may be, the cost of advertising notwithstanding, that there was a bigger profit for his master, perhaps a small commission for himself.

That was the machinery. When Mr. Hill had said he wanted people to put their hands in their "pockets," he no doubt intended that he wished to frame such advertisements as would induce the housewife even to *ask* for Dick's Soap. That, indeed, would be a triumph, the supreme feat of advertising, thought Jacob with enthusiasm — he had yet to learn the ingenuities of the "mail-order business."

He turned past the warnings against delay, the talk of inducements, show-cards, and window-attrac-

tions addressed to the grocer, and investigated the sketches of advertisements framed to attract the attention of the housewife.

So far these sketches were vague and unsatisfactory. The creator of the scheme had failed, as yet, to discover the key-phrase which would furnish the motive for the whole theme. He had trifled with ideas of nourishment, invigoration and purity, but it was easy to infer from internal evidence that such standard inducements as these gave no scope for orginality. Even Jacob, the neophyte, could see that. He put it to himself, adopting his own test, what promise would furnish such an inducement as would tempt him to buy —— Cocoa, to go in and ask for it. And, thinking of his recent depression and lack of initiative — a thought which took him back to many incidents of the past two years — he decided that he might have bought —— Cocoa in those circumstances if it had promised a brain tonic; or, to put the idea more popularly, if it had been sworn by all superlatives to contain the substance of brain-forming matter; brain-food, in fact.

He became heated with the enthusiasm of the creator; it was as if he had conceived a plot for a novel, some plot fertile in suggested situation, opening prospects of ingenious treatment; he saw, in short, "copy" in his idea. So carried away was he that he forgot that Mr. Farmer was wrapt in contemplation, seeking the perfect phrase, and was not to be addressed.

"I say," said Jacob, "where can I get some foolscap and a pen and ink?"

"Boy," returned Mr. Farmer, still plunged in meditation.

Jacob found the boy, commanded the first essentials of literature, and presently returned flushed with

eagerness to elaborate his inspiration. He lit a cigarette and began.

He worked with fury at first, drafting newspaper advertisements, ringing the changes on the possibilities of brain-food as an inducement to buyers of —— Cocoa, writing neat little explanatory paragraphs, conceiving headlines which might also be used for posters.

After a couple of hours, however, he began to feel the need for appreciation; he wanted to proclaim his glorious idea to some understanding person who would give him due meed of praise and encouragement. He looked round at Mr. Farmer, but that young man was writing busily. No doubt some exquisite phrase had presented itself to his waiting mind, and he, too, was expanding a flash of inspiration.

Jacob returned to his own task, but the first possibilities of his idea were exhausted. He trifled with another variation or two, but they were only paraphrases.

At half-past twelve George P. Hill looked in.

Jacob greeted him with joy.

"I've been looking through this cocoa scheme . . ." he began.

"Gotten any ideas?" asked Mr. Hill, noting the flush of achievement on Jacob's cheeks.

"Well, yes, I don't think it's bad . . ." said Jacob.

"Come into my office," said Mr. Hill.

Jacob picked up his papers and followed his chief. Farmer looked after him with an expression of curiosity that was not altogether free from dislike.

"Now," said Mr. Hill, seating himself and pointing to another chair, "go right ahead."

Jacob stumbled a little at first, but soon warmed to his theme. He explained and read alternately,

commenting occasionally on his own failure to express the precise value of his idea.

Mr. Hill listened in silence. But when the last page had been read, he remarked: "That goes."

"Is it all right, do you think?" asked Jacob, looking up.

"The idea's all right; you've hit the mark with that," replied Hill; "but you're too wordy with your copy. When I come back from lunch, I'll have Mr. Farmer go into detail with you, and will get that scheme fixed up right away."

Jacob was still hankering for a little more praise. He hesitated at the door, and said: "Er — do you think that I shall be any good at this business?"

"Sure," replied Mr. Hill, and with that Jacob was content.

He went up to Lee-Perry's bank in Holborn at lunch-time — the cheque had been left open — and obtained beautiful gold and notes. On the strength of his success he treated himself to a special lunch with a small bottle of claret, and dreamed brilliant dreams. He saw himself as the genius of the advertising profession — he pictured a future in which he was known as the greatest advertising agent of his day. He was beautifully happy. He thought he know what life meant.

4.

The afternoon's work was not so satisfactory. Farmer was critical. He found fault with the great idea, and took great pains to impress Jacob with a sense of his ignorance. But Jacob was not dispirited. Mr. Hill had approved the idea, that was the chief thing; Farmer's censure did not count.

On his way back to Bailey Street, Jacob bought

postal orders to the value of nine pounds. These were for the Vicar. Jacob did not intend to take even the five shillings a week that had been originally offered him. He felt, however, that he had earned his board and lodging.

When he arrived in his little attic, he found a letter awaiting him. In the envelope were two enclosures, one a letter from his brother to Barker, the other an unopened envelope addressed to himself. He regarded Eric's extraordinarily neat, tiny, but very legible handwriting and gave a shiver. He had been planning a course of action; he had decided that now he had a position, prospects of success, and a certain amount of capital, he would not submit to be browbeaten and cross-questioned. But the sight of that letter conjured up a picture of his brother. Jacob's dreams fell away from him; he knew that his was the inferior intellect; that now, as long ago, he would probably lose his temper and make an ass of himself, while Eric remained persistently cool and superior. He sighed and read Eric's letter to Barker. It was only a few lines.

"*Dear Sir,*

"When I have seen my brother and discussed the matter with him, I will see that the six pounds he has borrowed from you shall be repaid. I should be glad if you would give him the enclosed note.

"Yours truly,

"ERIC STAHL."

So like Eric. Of course, he had not committed himself by sending the six pounds until he had verified the Vicar's statement. Jacob smiled grimly, and opened the letter to himself. It read as follows:

"*My dear James*" (Eric had always called him James),

"I was amazed to hear from Mr. Barker — a stranger to me — that you are practically destitute, a statement I cannot quite credit. Please come over and see us at once, and give us full particulars. You can stay here as long as you like, we have plenty of room. I enclose P. O. for one pound, in case you are, indeed, without ready money at the moment.

"Your affect. brother,

"ERIC."

It was not a letter that overflowed with brotherly affection, but it was sufficient. Eric had done the right thing,— offered his brother a temporary home; no doubt, had it been necessary, he would have been at great pains to find Jacob a berth somewhere.

"Oh, well," said Jacob to himself, "I suppose I must go and get it over. Thank heaven I don't want his help."

He sat down and wrote to Barker, saying that he had received money from an unexpected source, and enclosed nine pounds — the amount of his debt. Then he reproached himself for ingratitude, and added: "I must thank you for finding me a position which promises success, so far as money goes. Mr. Hill seems satisfied that I shall be able to do the work required of me. I am very grateful, believe me, for all your kindness to me."

He never received any answer to that letter, an omission of the Vicar's which embittered Joseph for a time. But Barker was very busy at that moment; two of his best cases, Freda Cairns and Philip Laurence, were making much trouble at "63."

5.

Eric and his wife received Jacob with friendliness, but without effusion. Surprise was their note. They had been thunderstruck when they received Mr. Barker's letter — but evidently they had not been so upset that they had deemed it necessary to take any immediate steps. That letter from the Vicar must have reached them on Saturday afternoon.— They could not understand what had happened, and why was no mention made of Mrs. Stahl?

Jacob sighed and ruffled his hair. He felt that he really could not go into elaborate explanations before them both. He looked at his brother. "I think I had better talk over that part of it with you alone," he said.

"Oh! Why? Surely . . ." began Doris Stahl.

"Doris and I have no secrets," said Eric.

Mrs. Stahl narrowed her eyes slightly. Jacob wondered if she would be ready to confirm her husband's statement.

"It isn't that," said Jacob to his brother, "only there are some things which are rather difficult to say before your wife. I don't mind her knowing afterwards."

"Perhaps we'd better go into the study," suggested Eric, standing up.

Mrs. Stahl took up an open book that was lying on the table within reach of her hand, and began to read.

Eric frowned. "You understand, Doris . . ." he began.

"Oh, perfectly, perfectly," replied Mrs. Stahl, without looking up.

Jacob had a suspicion that his brother swore inwardly. He saw his sister-in-law for the first time

as a woman, hitherto he had only seen her as a scholar.

He followed his brother into the study. At the door he hesitated. Eric had gone over to the mantelpiece, and was filling a pipe — sure sign that he expected to be bored. He rarely smoked.

Jacob's hesitation was almost an act of deference to the atmosphere of the room he was about to enter. As he had followed his brother from the little drawing-room, he had been planning a statement of his confession. That suggestion of misunderstanding between husband and wife had been an encouragement to Jacob, it had made him conscious that these two people were fallible, human; that even Eric might perhaps be able to understand how impossible it was to endure a bullying wife.

This little flicker of hope was quenched even as he stood on the threshold of the " study "; library would have been a better name, for it was the largest room in the house; there was a hint of mock-modesty in the Stahls' description of it. It was, indeed, quite a remarkable library for that suburban, Putney house. It contained between five and six thousand picked books.

All libraries, even libraries which are somewhat similar in kind, have not the same atmosphere. The British Museum Reading-Room may impress you by its size, but if you are sensitive to atmospheres, you will find no feeling of awe there; if you feel awe it is the outcome of a definite, objective attitude. The Museum Library is to the majority of its frequenters little more than a bran-tub; dilettantes, journalists, and literary hacks of every kind go there to dip for prizes; and the few scholars have no effect to overcome the general air of adventure. You will probably find the attendants inside the circular counter reading travel or fiction. Contrast the atmosphere of

the Bodleian; the pertest young American woman subdues her shrieking admiration as she enters the public room which is so small a part of the whole. None ever found that gowned and scholarly curator reading fiction, nor saw him eye the prettiest woman with anything but a glance of irritable disapproval. Here is no spirit of human struggle, hazard, and enterprise — the atmosphere of the Bodleian is the atmosphere of the minster.

The atmosphere of Eric Stahl's library was one of cold, patient, accurate thought among the elements of relatively certain knowledge. Philosophy, sociology, economics were here reduced so far as was possible to a formula. In that world Jacob was checked. He admired intensely the scholarship which was completely beyond his attainment, and the thought of it made his designed explanations seem trivial, frail, illogical. Here psychology was reduced to laws, and Jacob had not then discovered, nor did he ever discover, one rule of human action which could be fairly described as universal. It is small wonder that he hesitated. . . .

"Won't you come over here?" said Eric, carefully filling his pipe, and then, with a faint complacency, he added: "Yes, you see it is still growing." And he glanced around at his books with an air of proprietorship.

"You haven't room for many more," said Jacob. He shut the door and lingered by the shelves, reading titles. He had been out of this world of books for many months. He remembered with regret his old longings for scholarship.

"Well," said Eric, as his brother still lingered, "hadn't we better get that explanation over? Doris will be waiting."

Jacob pulled himself together with an effort. He

sat down in a big, leather-covered armchair, and pulled out his cigarette-case.

"Lola and I have separated," he began, and then paused to light his cigarette. "I don't know whether it is necessary to go into details. There were faults on both sides, of course."

"I think I had better hear the details," said Eric.

Jacob cursed his own shortsightedness. If he had stayed in the drawing-room, he could have passed over all these unpleasantnesses. Now he had keened Doris's curiosity by refusing to speak before her, and he must give his brother some reason for that refusal. Eric could not go back to his wife without some excuse for having spared her what was inferentially, unpleasant detail. Like a fool, Jacob had committed himself.

"You remember Miss Felmersdale?" he asked.

Eric nodded. "She married Lord Paignton," he said.

"Well, you know there was something between us at Ashby-Sutton, years ago?"

"Yes. I understood that she had displayed a marked erotic tendency at the age of sixteen."

"Seventeen, I think," said Jacob.

"I understood there was someone else before you."

"How on earth did you know that?" asked Jacob.

"Is that essential?" asked Eric.

"No, not to my story. Only . . ."

"Let us come to essentials."

"Oh, well, I met her again last winter."

"And allowed yourself to be duped again?"

"Of course, you can't understand . . ."

Eric shrugged his shoulders. "There was no public scandal, I suppose? It was a hole and corner affair?"

"I used to go to Berkeley Square." It was a boast.

Eric, with all his attainments was a snob and Jacob knew it.

"When Lord Paignton was away, I presume," returned Eric.

"Generally," replied Jacob.

"And your wife heard about it?"

"She knew. But don't think that was the beginning of it all. We did not get on. She was always finding fault with me. I dare say I deserved it, but it is no earthly use snubbing me; that will never make me work."

"It seems to me your wife had good excuse for leaving you. I suppose she did leave you?"

"Yes," returned Jacob shortly.

"Is there any hope of a reconciliation?"

"None. I've . . . I've been in communication with her since. She is working with a Mrs. Murgatroyd, a sort of philanthropist person in Peckham."

"Your wife struck me as a fairly clever woman."

"Oh, yes!" said Jacob, restraining a sigh.

"It seems a great pity that you can't effect some sort of reconciliation. You might live in the same house. Would you like me to see her?"

"Very good of you," returned Jacob, "but it would be quite useless. And, in any case, I have not the least wish to live with her again, not even for the sake of keeping up appearances."

"You prefer to remain a social pariah?"

"Oh, what is society to me?"

"It is not a question of what society is to you; it is a question of whether you wish to go up or down in the social scale."

"It doesn't seem to be of much consequence."

Eric frowned and relit his pipe. "My dear James," he said, "you are talking like a petulant school-boy."

"I dare say," returned Jacob. "You always make me feel a fool."

Eric shrugged his shoulders. "Putting aside the question of your marriage for the moment," he said, "what about your financial position?"

"I was coming to that," said Jacob. "Since the Vicar — Barker, you know — wrote to you, I have made an arrangement with the sub-tenant in Bloomsbury Square to take over my lease, and we have agreed on a price for my furniture, which he has paid, in fact."

"Did you sell everything?" asked Eric.

Jacob remembered with a sudden qualm that his brother's wedding-present, a handsome revolving book-case, had been among the effects of the house. He had entirely forgotten the fact when he had made his bargain. He had a twinge of conscience. He felt that he ought to have excepted that one item.

"Yes," said Jacob. "He took everything just as it stood."

"How much did you get?"

"A hundred and twenty-five," replied Jacob. "I don't think it was bad." But the figure seemed to have lost its impressiveness. It sounded suddenly small.

"You had no sort of valuation made?"

"No," returned Jacob. He felt already that he had been criminally careless.

"Wasn't that very foolish?"

"Yes," returned Jacob desperately, "I *am* a fool."

Eric's expression implied concurrence with this statement, but he dropped this subject also, and went on. "And what about this berth your friend found for you? Isn't it a great mistake to change your profession?"

It was all a mistake from Eric's point of view, and who was Jacob to question Eric's authority? Had not Eric succeeded? Was he not an exemplar, whose advice should be treated as invaluable counsel? And had not Eric despised and censured Jacob since his school-days? Had not Eric been justified?

"It is a mistake from one point of view, I suppose . . ." began Jacob.

"It's a matter of general principle. You've acquired a certain amount of technical knowledge, and now you deliberately throw away all that knowledge and experience, and set out to learn an entirely new profession. You have to begin again from the bottom."

"I failed as an architect," replied Jacob.

"You appeared to be quite competent," returned Eric.

Jacob smiled at this compliment, and remembered that the only occasion on which he had completely triumphed over his brother, had arisen in connection with the testing of the drains of this house at Putney.

"Competent but not successful. There are so many competent architects," said Jacob.

"Do you think you have any special gift for writing advertisements?" asked Eric.

"I think I can make a living at it," replied Jacob. The glory of his day's success in Norfolk Street seemed such a poor, vulgar thing in this room. What would be Eric's opinion of Hill or Farmer? Would not Eric, indeed, disapprove of Jacob should that vision he had dreamed over lunch become a reality? Where was the glory of being a successful, even the most successful, advertising agent?

There were so many standards — Barker's, Hill's, Eric's, Madeline's — which of them all, if any, was

the most admirable? To-morrow, in the office, he might be regarding Eric as a narrow-minded scholar who knew nothing of life. Everything depended on the environment, on the immediate point of view. Which of them all was Jacob to choose — Jacob, who seemed able to appreciate so intimately the advantages of each in turn?

"I suppose, as usual, you will refuse to take advice," remarked Eric, after a pause.

Jacob's thought blossomed. "You see, you can only give advice from your own particular standpoint," he said. "It is a very admirable one, I admit, but it doesn't apply to me. You have certain gifts which have enabled you to succeed, but I haven't those gifts. And with all your cleverness, my dear Eric, you have very marked limitations, you are quite incapable of looking at any question from any point of view but your own."

"So Doris has told me," said Eric.

"Good for Doris," thought Jacob; aloud he said: "I suppose you won't believe her — or me?"

"In the particular case we are discussing I don't see that there can be two points of view," replied Eric.

"Then we must agree to differ," said Jacob. "By the way, I've brought back that postal order of yours. It was very good of you to send it."

Eric took the postal order offered to him. "You are determined to go your own way?" he asked.

"How can I help it?" said Jacob. . . .

When they returned to the drawing-room they found that Mrs. Stahl had gone to bed. "I haven't told you," said Eric, "that we hope to have a child next year."

"Oh, good!" said Jacob with sudden enthusiasm. "I hope there will be no trouble."

"I'm taking every care of Doris," said Eric.

As Jacob made his way back by the underground to Gower Street he congratulated himself on having "stood up to Eric," as he phrased it. "I'm not so much afraid of him as I used to be," he thought, "I believe I'm acquiring some kind of standpoint of my own." His thoughts turned to the prospects of Eric's child. "He'll be well educated," he reflected. "I wonder if he'll be as cast-iron as his father and mother." The thought of that child made him feel lonely. At the last analysis that was the real meaning of life, to beget a child and pass on one's personality to him. . . .

Eric, when he had given his wife a very accurate report of his interview with Jacob, remarked, "He's not a fool by any means, but he has no stamina, no resolution."

"I feel rather sorry for him," replied Doris.

6.

The next morning Jacob received another letter forwarded from Acacia Avenue. It was from Mrs. Latimer, and expressed the hope that if Mr. Stahl had no other engagement, he would come to 69, Beaulieu Mansions, Maida Vale, next Sunday afternoon and have tea with the writer.

Jacob's first thought was that he had not a decent suit of clothes. He wondered whether he could get a suit made in time. There was a little tailor's shop in Bloomsbury that he used to patronize before he was married; he decided that he would go there during his lunch-time. He could no longer afford a West End tailor. He meant to be very careful with that £125.

He remembered that there were many other things to be done. He must buy boots, as well as clothes,

and he must see about changing his rooms; he could do that in the evening. Also, he must open a banking account; he could not carry all that money about with him. These little chores fretted him. He hated small worries.

He wrote to Mrs. Latimer from the office and accepted her invitation. He wanted to see her again. He wanted to have some friend in whom he could confide.

That evening he disinterred the typescript of his novel, and read a chapter here and there, and noted the fact that "Florence" had made many mistakes in typing, and had left *lacunæ* in places where she had been completely baffled by his handwriting. "I suppose I shall have to go all through this," he thought, and wondered whether the novel were worth the trouble.

It occurred to him that he was at a parting of the ways; faced with the necessity for making a determining choice between literature and business. As the problem was presented to him, he saw that his failure had been largely due to his lack of concentration upon one particular object. He toyed idly with the sheets of typescript. "I have just been playing at life, so far," he reflected; "playing with literature and with business. I must give up one or the other, and it had better be literature. I have no particular talent for writing. I will give it up and try hard to make money. Perhaps I may be successful in the advertising business and make money quickly. When I have enough to live upon, say, two hundred a year, I will retire, go and live in the country, and learn to write."

He felt relieved from an irksome necessity. His determination set him free from the toil of attempting to write for a public he did not know how to please.

If he did write at all, he would do it to please himself. He decided definitely that he would devote himself to advertising, concentrate his thought and his energies to the task of making money quickly. He put the typescript of his novel away, and made up his mind that he would not take it with him when he went to see Mrs. Latimer on Sunday.

CHAPTER X

THE PALIMPSEST

1.

Margaret Brookes had begun life at an age that with many women marks the incipience of decline, the beginning of wistful reminiscences anent the glories that are faded, or certainly fading. Her childhood had been cloistered; she had been taught French, Italian, music, the use of the globes, and those other polite accomplishments which were deemed necessary in the 'sixties, but of life she had learnt nothing. Her father had been a family lawyer of the old school — he wore a stock to the day of his death, and he died in 1875 — but, unlike many of his contemporaries, he made no fortune out of his practice. He was a silent, reserved man, who had risen from the office stool, and doubtless many possible clients passed him by on that account. He married late in life, and when he died at the age of seventy-three, his wife found herself with an income of sixty pounds a year and a daughter to provide for. Margaret was then twenty-two — a tall, thin, dark, unattractive girl, with an unquestioning belief in the chronology of the Old Testament, and an equally firm faith in the truism that man — using the word in its restricted designation as the antithesis of woman — was a designing creature, compact of all wickedness. Her own father, according to precedent, had been unique, but among other exceptions might be counted the late

lamented Prince Albert and all clerics, by virtue of their office.

Faced with the problem of ways and means, Margaret made the original suggestion that she should go out as a governess to some genteel family, preferably clerical. Mrs. Brookes had at first been shocked at the daring of this proposal, but when an offer presented itself, the question was discussed between mother and daughter, and ultimately decided — after many tears and protestations — in favour of acceptance.

If Margaret's life had been cloistered as a child, it was not less shut in during her eleven years' service as governess to the children of Canon Noakes. Not, indeed, till she was suddenly cast upon the world again at the age of thirty-three did Margaret begin to awake to the fact that she was living in an age that was great with the child of new thought.

Her attention was first called to the fact by the conversation of a man of seventy-one, the uncle of her new employer. Gerald Latimer was one of those men who never grow old. Blessed with independent means, he had read and travelled all his life. His wife had died when he was forty, and thereafter he had wandered at will, a childless man, who had found all life interesting. To Latimer the mind of Margaret was a revelation, not because it was so unlettered — that was a type he knew well — but because it was so ripe for cultivation. He began her education by talking to her of the wonders of science, and ended it, so far as he was concerned, by marrying her.

When she became a widow at thirty-eight, Margaret Latimer was a changed woman. Her mother had been dead then for many years, and Margaret had none to whom she owed any duty. She had dallied with literature during her short married life, and

now, with sufficient means at her disposal, she decided to live in London and continue the fascinating course of study she had begun so late.

It was no miracle that had so altered her outlook, her very character; hers was merely a case of retarded development. Had she never met Gerald Latimer, she might have died in her pristine innocence, but always she had been ripe for the reception of knowledge.

2.

Jacob Stahl thought Mrs. Latimer a very advanced woman. In some ways he was right. The reaction had swung her towards the other extreme; yet the metaphor does not hold, for certain old habits of thought in her were quite inalterable. Humanity cannot be figured by any mechanical analogy.

It was inevitable, nevertheless, that Jacob's first impressions at the flat in Maida Vale should be of a woman who had small respect for the conventions. That side was always the one Margaret Latimer was most anxious to display. She put it forward quite deliberately; she was eager to make it her ruling motive.

Jacob had some little difficulty in finding the flat. An inquiry for "Bewly" Mansions evoked no sign of intelligence either from the bus conductor or from tradesmen's boys, and it did not occur to him till later that "Bo-lew" was the accepted pronunciation in the neighbourhood. That explanation did not present itself until he chanced upon a great pile of red-brick buildings that bore the name "Beaulieu Mansions" in strong black letters on the stone lintel of every doorway.

The story of his mistake made an excellent substi-

tute, he thought, for the usual comment on the weather, when he had been ushered by a clean-looking maid into the drawing-room of the flat. Mrs. Latimer smiled appreciatively, and confessed that she, too, always referred to her address as "Bo-lew" in her dealings with tradesmen; but she changed the subject quickly. Jacob did not realize that this opening anecdote was quite as familiar to his hostess, as the more universal references to rain or sunshine.

They touched upon no personal matters during tea; indeed, Jacob found few opportunities for speech. Mrs. Latimer took up the conversation and maintained it at a high pitch. She criticized current literature freely, and so steadily that her guest had little opportunity for an expression of his own views. Mrs. Latimer's exposition was, doubtless, quite good of its kind, but it bored Jacob; he found his attention wandering, he was wishing that Mrs. Latimer would ask him to smoke.

She made that concession later, but he did not stay very long. He found that the stream of her conversation was not to be dammed by any of his interpolations. His contradictory efforts, beginning, "I'm not quite sure that I agree with you . . ." were overridden by further exposition that gave him no opportunity to expound his own point of view.

He came away without making any statements as to his improved financial outlook, and it was not till the last moment that any reference was made to his novel.

"You never brought me your book, after all," was the first admission Mrs. Latimer made of any personal interest in her visitor.

"It would only bore you," replied Jacob. He was already on his feet, preparing to take leave of her.

"I should like to read it," she said, still, however, without enthusiasm.

Jacob hesitated, at a loss to find some reasonable excuse for not sending or bringing his manuscript. "The fact is," he explained, "that I have only one copy, and I'm thinking of sending it to a publisher — to-morrow. I — I've been correcting the typist's mistakes."

"Oh, of course, in that case I must wait," replied Mrs. Latimer.

"It's sure to come back," said Jacob reassuringly.

"I hope not," she said. "Still, if it does, will you let me read it?"

"I should be very glad to have your opinion," returned Jacob, and then, "Oh, by the way, I've left Acacia Avenue, and I'm not staying on at the rooms I'm in now. . . ." He broke off, not sure whether he were not taking too much for granted in assuming that Mrs. Latimer would care to have his new address.

"Well, you know where to find me now," she said; "I hope you will come and see me again without an invitation. I'm nearly always in on Sunday afternoon."

"Thanks very much. Yes, I shall be delighted," said Jacob.

He was disappointed. He had expected an interesting discussion on books and writers, and he had listened to what was, in effect, a lecture, which had not amused him. He felt that Mrs. Latimer had been instructing him, had laid down the law of intelligent criticism for his benefit, and he was slightly annoyed. No doubt Mrs. Latimer was a well-read woman of considerable discrimination, and an authority in certain circles on the right things to read — she had let fall a hint that she did some reviewing, though she had not mentioned the name of any paper in this con-

nection — but, however wide her experience, she might have attributed a little intelligence to her listener — have given him an opportunity to express an opinion. And at the back of his resentment, Jacob was critical, he doubted Mrs. Latimer's qualifications as a lecturer. On more than one occasion he had not agreed with her, had been eager to counter her slightly dogmatic pronouncements. He had not been oppressed by that feeling of ignorance which he experienced when his brother gave out an opinion. Mrs. Latimer was no Eric, of that Jacob felt quite sure.

So arguing and building up his resentment, he decided that he should not call again at Beaulieu Mansions. He had made a mistake in his estimation of Mrs. Latimer. He was willing enough to admit to himself that pique, the slight to his personal vanity, was the real cause of this decision; but he saw no reason why he should cultivate the acquaintance of a woman who did not interest him. He had decided finally to abandon literature for business, and Mrs. Latimer's knowledge of men and women who lived in the world of letters and might have been helpful to him was, now, quite useless.

He took out his novel again when he reached his attic; he almost made up his mind to destroy it, but could not summon the resolution to sacrifice the result of so much patient endeavour. He put it away with a sigh, and went out to supper at an Italian restaurant in the Euston Road.

He felt depressed. He had expected to find a friend in Mrs. Latimer; she had appeared to be interested in him, and he wanted encouragement. His mind reverted to his unwritten story. Certainly he was like that hero of his conception. He would never write unless he had someone to take a strong personal interest in his work. However, he had plumped for

a business career; perhaps Fate was intent on keeping him up to that election.

It was significant that Mrs. Latimer had only remembered to ask about his novel just as he was leaving.

3.

Jacob knew nothing of those eleven years spent in the Minister Precincts; and had the knowledge been revealed to him, he would have had neither the wit nor the experience to discover an explanation of Mrs. Latimer's attitude towards himself on that Sunday afternoon, although he might have been led to the deduction that she was, at heart, more conventional than her speech implied.

Such a simple deduction, if it contained the elements of truth, might have led to a false conclusion. There were so many other relevant considerations to take into account.

In Mrs. Latimer's case, a late mental development must be allowed for, but her retarded sexual development was a factor not less important in any consideration of her character. And shadowing both developments, was the personality of the man whom she had regarded as prince of husbands and teachers.

One can only regard Mrs. Latimer as a palimpsest in which the later writing mingled with and often failed to obscure the earlier script. Neither Gerald Latimer nor any other man could have erased completely the original writing; it had a quality of permanence which the woman herself could not destroy; indeed, one may hazard that in certain circumstances the tracing of her husband would have proved the more fugitive. Meanwhile, Mrs. Latimer was intent

on graving in the lessons she had learnt during her brief married life.

This she did deliberately, sometimes with pain, and on that account her development marks a contrast to that of Jacob Stahl, whose expansion was a natural growth and not a graft.

Mrs. Latimer, in her own phrase, could have smacked herself when Jacob had gone. She had been unable to throw off her nervousness while he was present. She was one of those women who laugh most when they are on the verge of tears, talk most when they have nothing to say, and the shyness she could not conquer — shyness due solely to the fact that she was alone in the flat with a young man whose personality attracted and interested her — had urged her to talk without pause, lest they should fall on any subject that might have led to the embarrassment of a mind that was still influenced by the writing of the Precincts, no matter how steadfastly she recited her new rule of independence.

So distressed was Mrs. Latimer by the discovery of her own unconquerable perversity of character, that she could only find consolation in a six-mile walk to Cricklewood and back. Walking was her panacea for this mental atavism of hers. When she returned to her flat she sat down and wrote to the man of whom she had recently been so unnecessarily afraid.

4.

Jacob found the letter awaiting him — forwarded from Acacia Avenue — when he arrived at Bailey Street on Monday evening. He had been looking for rooms since he left the office and had settled on a very comfortable sitting-room and bedroom in Torrington Square. They were beyond his means — he could

not afford thirty-three shillings a week — but he was in a hopeful mood so far as his financial prospects were concerned, and he had taken them and paid a deposit. He meant to move in the next evening.

Mrs. Latimer's note was to the effect that she had two seats for a concert at a hall in Wigmore Street, and would Jacob care to go with her? "Quite a small affair," she wrote, "but I dare say it won't be bad. Perhaps you could fetch me and we could drive down together. The concert begins at 8.30." The tickets were enclosed; they were dated for the following Wednesday.

Jacob frowned. He had not the least wish to go to the concert. He thought it showed a great want of consideration that Mrs. Latimer should suggest his going all the way out to Maida Vale to fetch her. Why couldn't she have met him at the door? He would hardly have time to dress and get something to eat. He would, of course, have to dress. He hesitated, and mentally framed a refusal, but when he sat down to write the thought occurred to him that, notwithstanding his impressions of the day before, Mrs. Latimer must be anxious to cultivate his acquaintance. He wondered why she had not mentioned the concert yesterday. Her letter was dated Sunday. She was an odd woman. Perhaps she might be worth studying — a sort of new experience. The concert might be dull, but he had nothing else to do. So, finally, he wrote accepting the invitation and gave her his new address; and then cursed the necessity for going down and up all those stairs again in order to post his acceptance. Thank goodness his rooms in Torrington Square were on the ground floor.

In the office on Wednesday afternoon he wished that he had refused that invitation. He might have

gone back to his new rooms and had a cosy evening — it was cold enough for a fire; instead of that soothing prospect he faced the alternative of hurrying back, getting into evening-dress — a thing he always disliked — snatching a hasty meal, and then rushing off again to Maida Vale with, probably, no time for a cigarette — all in order to attend a third-rate concert with a woman who would probably bore him. He nearly decided to send a telegram making an excuse, but reflected that he could not enclose the tickets.

He was slightly consoled by the respect of the patron and waiter in the Italian restaurant, a tribute to a customer in evening-dress, but even that had its drawbacks, for Jacob had not the courage to give the small order he had intended, and to magnify it ordered a quarter flask of Chianti. The drinking of this and the reckless mood it begot — a mood which led him on to smoking a cigarette in the restaurant regardless of the time — made him late in arriving at Beaulieu Mansions.

Mrs. Latimer had evidently expected him earlier; she met him in the hall with her cloak on and a scarf over her head.

"I'm so sorry I am late," said Jacob; "but you see. . . ."

"It doesn't matter in the least," interrupted Mrs. Latimer, and, turning to the maid, she instructed her to get a hansom at once.

Jacob, warm with Chianti, had no intention of being suppressed so easily, and as they followed the maid downstairs — so urgent was Mrs. Latimer's haste — he said:

"But really you must allow me to explain." Mentally he was saying, "It is your own silly fault for making me come all this way out."

"Oh, I'm quite sure you couldn't help it," returned Mrs. Latimer.

That did not satisfy Jacob. "You see, I don't leave the office till past six," he explained, "and then I had to get back to Torrington Square, and dress and have something to eat. It really did not give me much time."

"Oh, are you working in an office now?" said Mrs. Latimer. "You never told me that."

The maid was blowing a horribly shrill whistle within a few feet of them. Jacob put his hands to his ears. "I'll tell you about it in a minute," he said —"if you wish to hear, that is."

But when a hansom responded at last to that strident call, it was not rubber-tyred, and conversation was still difficult. Jacob always found it troublesome to conduct a conversation which necessitated close attendance as listener and a raised voice as speaker. He disliked to be compelled to ask for a repetition of his companion's remark, he disliked even more to be requested to repeat his own. He wished Mrs. Latimer would keep silence until they reached better-paved streets — the St. John's Wood Road was quite impossible — but she seemed intent on talking, she seemed afraid of letting the conversation lapse for a single moment.

At last Jacob expostulated.

"It's no good," he said, making a gesture with his hands towards his ears. "I simply can't hear."

"What did you say?" asked Mrs. Latimer.

"The noise," explained Jacob. "I simply can't hear."

Mrs. Latimer nodded. "Yes, yes, terrible," she agreed, "we'll wait." She squeezed herself well into her own corner of the cab and closed her eyes.

Jacob, a little on edge, thanked heaven for a respite,

and pictured the snugness of his own room and the delights of "Huxley's Lay Sermons," a book which he had yesterday picked up second-hand and which he was eager to read. . . .

The concert could not be pronounced a success. The debutante pianiste, for whose advertisement it was promoted and who was responsible for the greater part of the programme, was doubtless a very brilliant and highly skilled executant, but her music made no appeal to Jacob. It was all so loud and declamatory. He was fascinated for a time by watching the almost incredible agility of her fingers, but he thought the sounds she produced little preferable to the rattle of the rickety, iron-tyred hansom.

Between each item of the programme Mrs. Latimer offered criticisms, and, again, Jacob was somewhat embarrassed. His own knowledge of music could be summed up in that phrase which to the initiated is above all others the mark of inanity and ignorance — he knew what he liked. To admit that was to put him beyond the pale. And, conscious of his own ignorance, he did not care to express approval or disapproval of the chief performer in the hearing of his immediate neighbours. The audience was a small one, but the greater part of it was massed into the first six rows of seats, and Jacob and Mrs. Latimer in the fourth row were well surrounded.

At first Jacob responded with affirmatives, but after the third item he felt that it was time he displayed some sign of intelligence. He took the only line possible and made confession.

"I'm very fond of music," he explained, "but I'm really no judge at all. I can't criticize technique or anything of that sort."

"It's very nice to enjoy music without criticizing," said Mrs. Latimer.

"Yes, very nice," assented Jacob.

"Are you enjoying this?" asked Mrs. Latimer.

Jacob looked uncomfortable. "I find it a little too loud," he said.

"But she has wonderful execution," returned Mrs. Latimer.

"Oh, yes, of course," said Jacob. "Wonderful!"

They found a rubber-tyred hansom for the return journey. Jacob realized that he was expected to go all the way out to Maida Vale again. But on this journey they achieved an understanding.

Mrs. Latimer dropped the subject of the concert, asked Jacob about his new work, and listened with intelligent interest while he described his new duties. She encouraged him to talk, in fact, and led him to believe that his account of an advertising agent's business was decidedly interesting to her.

On the steps of Beaulieu Mansions she asked him to which publisher he had sent his novel.

Jacob looked at her with a touch of whimsicality in his expression. "Oh, I haven't sent it yet," he said, finally.

"Why not?" she asked. "Haven't you finished the corrections?"

"I'm not sure that I'm going to send it to a publisher," he replied.

"Then why am I not to be allowed to read it?" she asked.

"I'm rather ashamed of it," admitted Jacob.

"How silly you are," said Mrs. Latimer, with a little laugh, that was not free from self-consciousness. "Now you are to send it to me to-morrow, and you are to come on Sunday and receive a perfectly candid opinion on it. Will you do that?"

"It's awfully good of you," said Jacob warmly. "Are you sure you don't mind?"

"It is a promise, then?" was Mrs. Latimer's last word, as she went up the stone staircase.

Jacob went back to Torrington Square, feeling that Mrs. Latimer was, after all, going to prove a valuable and agreeable friend. She was a little old-fashioned in some ways despite her profession of modernity, but she was an interesting and well-informed woman, and for some inexplicable reason she seemed to have conceived a liking for that worthless failure, Jacob Stahl.

5.

When Jacob was shown into the drawing-room of 69, Beaulieu Mansions on Sunday, he found Mrs. Latimer sitting at her writing-table. As he came in she pushed something hurriedly into a drawer, closed it, and rose to meet him.

Jacob received the impression that she was slightly confused.

"I have finished your novel," she said, as she shook hands with him. "And I have just been reading some parts of it a second time."

"You've promised me your candid opinion, remember," returned Jacob. "I know, myself, that it's all wrong."

"No, no," said Mrs. Latimer. "It's not *all* wrong, by any means. I think some of the little essays you have worked in are delightful and wonderfully true. And I like the way you finish your chapters with some little dramatic touch that makes one stop and think. And the opening is beautifully done; you pictured that old inn in the Temple so vividly that I felt I must go down and explore it. In fact, I went yesterday afternoon."

Jacob flushed with pleasure. "Did you really?"

he asked. "Did you find it? It's that little court — I forget the name — just off Middle Temple Lane on the right side as you go down from Fleet Street."

Mrs. Latimer hesitated. "Is it called Paper Buildings?" she asked.

"No; Paper Buildings are on the other side," replied Jacob.

"Then I am afraid I made a mistake," said Mrs. Latimer. "I found what I thought must be the place, and asked a man, who told me that it was Paper Buildings. I was so disappointed with the name."

Jacob winced a little; Paper Buildings were so completely unlike the little court he had endeavoured to describe.

"Of course," he said, "I didn't say much about the place really; I suppose it was the plane-tree you were looking out for?"

"Perhaps it was; and I found several," replied Mrs. Latimer; "but that is not the least essential."

"Not a bit," said Jacob; "you were coming to the faults of the book, I think."

"Well, yes, I don't like the way you describe every detail, and generally dot all your 'i's' and cross your 't's.' I want to have something left to my imagination. Even your characters are catalogued: you tell one what kind of a nose they have, and how they shake hands, and all those kind of things. I do like to be able to make my own pictures of people."

Jacob was surprised at this criticism. He was of opinion that these descriptions of his were the best part of the book, such as it was. He thought they were vivid, and gave good pictures of his characters.

"Yes?" he said, on a questioning note; and then, seeing his answer, he went on quickly: "But I want my readers — if I have any — I want you, for instance, to picture my people precisely as I see them

myself. If I have a heroine with a snub nose, I want you to know its a snub, or you may picture it as aquiline."

"I may prefer her to have an aquiline nose," returned Mrs. Latimer, whose own nose was a nondescript.

"But, then, she is not the girl I want to tell you about," protested Jacob.

"Don't you think it's better to let one have one's own idea about these things?" asked Mrs. Latimer. "Don't you hate to have illustrations in a book?"

"Yes, yes, I do," said Jacob. He felt sure that there was a fallacy somewhere in Mrs. Latimer's argument, but he could not expose it at the moment. "Only then the artist may not carry out the idea of the author, may he?" he suggested.

"I hate any illustrations in a novel," replied Mrs. Latimer, "no matter how well they are done."

"Yes, I agree with you about the illustrations," persisted Jacob; "but I can't help feeling that if I could write — I admit I cannot write yet — I should want my readers to have precisely the same picture of my characters that I had myself."

"Oh, do leave something to the imagination," returned Mrs. Latimer. "Surely you don't care for a book that gives you nothing to think about."

Jacob was rather irritated by this feminine logic. He saw, dimly, the confusion of ideas in Mrs. Latimer's mind, and he groped for an illustration that should elucidate the obscurities of her mental process.

"Certainly," he said, "I like a book that gives one something to think about — such as 'Robert Elsmere,' for instance. But if Mrs. Ward had not made the characters of Elsmere and his wife quite clear, one could not have understood the problem. Do you see what I mean?"

"I am not a great admirer of Mrs. Ward's books," returned Mrs. Latimer. "I think she is too photographic."

Jacob gave it up. The conversation reminded him of arguments he had had with his wife — arguments in which he had striven to expound a principle — and she had replied by making some application of a particular case. He wondered whether women were all alike in this inability to concern themselves with an abstract motive, as distinguished from the practice exemplified in some personal experience. Personally, it was the principle that he found chiefly interesting.

"Let us agree to differ on the question of descriptions being good or bad," he suggested with a smile. "Please tell me some of the other things you find fault with."

"I don't think you understand women," said Mrs. Latimer.

"No man ever does," returned Jacob. "But what makes you say so in this case? Was it the character of Mrs. Hemmersley?"

"Partly," replied Mrs. Latimer. She looked towards the manuscript which lay on her desk.

"Shall I give it to you?" asked Jacob, getting to his feet.

"No, no; I can remember," said Mrs. Latimer quickly: "I think you said in one place that women are 'passive and imitative.'"

"Did I?" asked Jacob. "I really don't remember. Could you show me the place?"

"It's at the end of one of the chapters, but never mind. Tea will be in directly. But do you think women are passive and imitative?"

"On broad lines, I suppose," generalized Jacob.

"No, you don't understand women a bit, or you

couldn't say that," said Mrs. Latimer. "They are just as active and original as men."

Jacob doubted, but agreed politely. "I dare say," he said.

Tea came, but they continued to discuss the novel, with frequent diversions into some side issue more or less revelant to the main theme.

There could be no doubt that Mrs. Latimer's opinion of the book was decidedly higher than Jacob's own. He should have been flattered, but, on the contrary, he felt disappointed. He did not agree with her small criticisms, which he considered trivial, finicking; while, even when prompted by his suggestions, she failed to point out the very real faults of which he was perfectly conscious. Yet while she made these obvious critical errors, she still impressed him as a well-read and thoughtful woman. He came to a statement of his own mistakes at last.

"I'm afraid you are too good to me," he said; "I think my own characters are altogether inconsistent. . . ."

"Only because you have over-described them," interpolated Mrs. Latimer.

Jacob smiled, and passed that by. "And my construction is horrible," he continued.

"Why don't you rewrite it, if you think that?" asked Mrs. Latimer.

"One doesn't feel up to writing when one has been working in an office from nine till six."

"But there are Sundays."

"Yes, once a week."

"It does seem such a pity that you shouldn't persevere," continued Mrs. Latimer. "There can be no question that you have marked literary ability."

"You are the first person who has ever told me so."

"Am I? What a pity! I should think you are one of those people who want encouragement."

"That's terribly true," returned Jacob.

There was a short pause, and then Mrs. Latimer got up and put together the pages of Jacob's manuscript. "Will you try and rewrite this?" she asked. "And let me see the result bit by bit, as you do it?"

Jacob was slightly embarrassed. He did not know how to express his thanks for this remarkable offer. "It's awfully good of you," he stammered; "I don't know why you should be bothered."

"That's my affair. Will you try?"

"Yes, I'll try," said Jacob. . . .

He took the novel home with him, and began the work of rewriting it that very night. It seemed to make such a difference, this certainty that someone would read — and admire? — what he wrote. He decided to abide in the main by Mrs. Latimer's expressions of opinion; he would not put in such detailed descriptions of his characters, for instance; he would alter his pronouncement about the general character of woman. He found that his adjectives had been "receptive and uninitiative," not "passive and imitative." However, the intention was much the same

CHAPTER XI

MRS. LATIMER'S SPECTACLES

1.

One Saturday night at the end of October Jacob laid down his book, stretched his feet out towards the fire, lit a cigarette, and gave his mind to a review of his month's work. He was at ease, content for the moment, and he found his surroundings and condition of mind conducive to reflection.

He was doing fairly well at the office. It is true that he had had no more "brain-waves"— as Farmer called them — the same vigour as that which had begotten the scheme for —— Cocoa, but he was learning very quickly the technicalities of his business, becoming familiar with the essentials of "advertisements that talked," getting an understanding of the means and methods of the advertising agent. He was no longer an amateur, and Mr. Hill had expressed his approval of the progress made, and Farmer, though frequently ill-tempered and scornfully critical, now treated Jacob more or less as an equal.

All this was cause for congratulation. Becoming introspective, he reasoned that he had a quick and assimilative brain, and saw no reason why he should not make money as an advertising agent. Farmer had spoken of "managers" who earned such incredible salaries as two thousand pounds a year. Jacob saw no reason why at his present rate of progress he should not become an advertisement

manager in a few months' time. Advertising was not like architecture; it did not need so long an apprenticeship. He would not rest content with a salary of "fifty dollars a month"; if Mr. Hill would not give him a rise, he would try some other agent. Farmer had said that getting a position was chiefly a question of bluff.

He dismissed his business prospects on a note of self-congratulation but the dreams of financial success which followed were not as uplifting as might have been expected. The prospect of retiring at fifty, or forty-five, or forty with an income of three, or four, or five hundred a year — it was difficult to account, reasonably, for larger figures — lacked attractiveness. The crux presented itself as a statement of the question, "Why retire?" He had to admit that the business of an advertising agent only attracted him as a means of making money. And yet when one heard Mr. Hill speaking of his profession, one must believe that he regarded it as certainly among the greatest.

Jacob had to admit that in his heart he despised advertising as a profession, that he was, in a sense, only playing with it as a business. He had become interested in the machinery, especially in the arts of printing and process; the game of tempting the public amused him; and he was proud of the ease with which he had grasped the main principles and applied them. But he was not warmed to any living enthusiasm. He saw the probability that he would become an intelligent, competent advertising agent, as he had been an intelligent, competent architect. That was not a prospect which promised great success.

Jacob Stahl, dreamer as he was, had a very logical imagination. He could not picture any apotheosis unless the steps which led to it were clearly defined.

He had dreamed no dreams of acquiring a colossal fortune in his present work, because there had been no reasonable probabilities which would have provided the figures. So, now, the same logic was forcing upon him the conclusion that he would never become a leading light in the advertising world; and, indeed, it was not an ambition that greatly appealed to him.

The natural association of ideas led him to the consideration of his novel.

The new version was certainly better than the old. He had rewritten it as far as the eighth chapter, and the characters were consistent, now, with the plot, and the development of the story promised well on the whole. Nevertheless, he was not satisfied with it, and he believed that Mrs. Latimer was not altogether pleased, though she gave him nothing but encouragement, and always pressed him to go on. He found his own writing lacking in inspiration. There were passages in the first book, bad as it was, which were far better than anything he had done in the revision. He attributed his failure to brain-fag. How could one write after nine hours of office work? No. He must, somehow, make enough money to be independent, and then he would write. Yes, that ambition appealed to him — that was living. There was so much he wanted to say. The last six months had given him so many new ideas about life. . . .

Unfortunately, Mrs. Latimer was leaving England in a few days. She hated the English winter, and she was going to Rome. He would miss her terribly. They met every Sunday — he generally stayed to supper now — and very often in the week, as well. She was an interesting companion, and she was teaching him many things about himself. Last Sunday she had, half-laughingly, given him a sketch of his own character. He had admitted the

truth of much of her detail, but in some ways, he thought, she misunderstood him. She had said, for instance, that he had a very good opinion of his own abilities. That he denied. His fault had always been a lack of self-confidence.

His last reflection before he went to bed was that it was curious that neither he nor Mrs. Latimer had ever become reminiscent in their conversation. He knew nothing of her past life, except that she had lived abroad for some years, nor had he made any confession as to his own history.

He was not quite sure whether Mrs. Latimer even knew that he was married.

2.

On this last Sunday before Mrs. Latimer went to Italy for the winter, Jacob, as he came in, found her again in the act of secreting some article in the drawer of her writing-table.

She extended a hand to him over the back of her chair. "I have been reading it all through from the beginning," she said.

Jacob stood by the table and looked down upon the manuscript of his revised novel. It had all been sent to her this week, by request. She had told him that there were certain points she wanted to refer to. He wondered vaguely why she always left the reading of his work until the last minute. He generally found that she had "just finished" reading, or re-reading, his last chapter.

"I am not satisfied with it," he said, thinking of his last night's analysis.

"That's a pose," replied Mrs. Latimer. "You know perfectly well that you think it wonderful, really."

"Indeed and indeed I don't," replied Jacob. "I do wish I could make you understand that it's not false modesty on my part to say I don't like this book."

"Then it's very stupid of you."

"I wish I could think so," said Jacob.

"Are you trying to concoct some excuse for not going on with it?" Jacob was standing very close to her chair, and she turned and peered up at him with dull, short-sighted eyes.

"I'm not sure that I shall go on with it," he said; he moved away from her chair and sat down by the fire. Mrs. Latimer pushed the sheets of manuscript together.

"Why not?" she asked.

"This is not the story I want to write," he said. He was sitting turned away from her, staring into the fire.

"What is the story you want to write?" she asked.

"It's the story of a man who . . ." He broke off with a little apologetic laugh. "Of course you'll think it's very silly."

Mrs. Latimer was fidgeting nervously with the papers on her desk, aimlessly smoothing out a sheet which had been crumpled. "I should like to hear the story," she said.

"I'm afraid you'll think it so horribly sentimental," replied Jacob, and he leaned forward and poked the fire — a liberty he had never taken before in the house.

"Go on, please; I'm waiting," said Mrs. Latimer.

"It's the story of a man whose one great ambition in life was to find someone who would love him, wholeheartedly and unreservedly, for his own sake." Jacob was sitting back in his chair again, and as he outlined the story he stared absently in front of him.

His story became vivid to him once more, engrossed him; he almost forgot his listener in his concentration on the endeavour to picture in words the thing that was so real to his imagination.

At the beginning of his recital Mrs. Latimer sat very still, her hands still pressed upon the crumpled sheet of manuscript; but as Jacob elaborated the character and needs of his imaginary hero, she began to fidget slightly, then pushed her chair a little away from the desk, and very, very softly slid open the centre drawer of her writing-table. It was no very gruesome skeleton that she silently withdrew from that hiding place; it was, indeed that commonplace, necessary equipment, a pair of spectacles.

This Sunday was to be a day of illumination to Mrs. Latimer. The first element that went to the making of her new conception of Jacob was the story he was still unfolding; that gave her a new insight into the quality of his imagination. The second element was this her first clear sight of his physical being. Hitherto she had seen him but vaguely; she had been aware of the general value of outline and colour, but the detail had been hidden from her. Now, from her point of vantage, she studied him for the first time. It was only his profile that she could see, and that imperfectly, save when he turned slightly toward her — a movement that sent a nervous hand up to her spectacles.

The third element was a matter of fact, and that was still to be added to the other two.

The story ended lamely. "I'm not sure about the rest of it," he said. "Originally I meant the man to commit suicide. Do you think it all very silly?"

She had laid her spectacles on the pile of manuscript.

3.

When the story began, Mrs. Latimer had believed that it had a particular significance, but its elaboration had almost destroyed the possibility of its application to a particular case. If this history of the man with the feminine soul were in any sense a parable, it was unnecessarily aberrant, and the climax had never been reached.

"Why shouldn't he meet someone who could love him in the way he wanted to be loved?" asked Mrs. Latimer, in reply to Jacob's last remark.

"It would have to be a woman," returned Jacob. "And somehow I can't picture her."

If he had been speaking in parables, the application was not the one Mrs. Latimer had half anticipated.

"When did you think of this story?" she asked.

"Two or three months ago," replied Jacob, "at the beginning of August, just when I was beginning the first version of that thing." He turned his chair round towards her, and indicated the manuscript on her desk.

"Did anything, any incident, begin it?" asked Mrs. Latimer.

"Well, yes, I suppose so — in a way; but that's a long story."

"Couldn't I hear it?"

"Oh yes, you could, of course, if it would interest you. After tea, perhaps, if you would really like to hear it. But I warn you," he smiled, "it means practically the whole story of my life."

"Yes, tell it to me after tea," replied Mrs. Latimer. She was playing with the spectacles that lay on her desk. She wanted him to see them now; she wanted to be frank.

"You haven't told me yet what you think of my story as a subject for a novel?" he said.

"It's terribly sad," commented Mrs. Latimer. "I think it's beautiful, but I'm not quite sure whether you could write it yet; you haven't learned how it ought to end."

"I expect he'll have to die," said Jacob.

Mrs. Latimer shook her head. "You must wait a little before you write that story," she said. "And then it will be a masterpiece."

"Do you think so? Really?"

"When the key to it comes to you."

"If there is a key?" suggested Jacob.

"Of course there is a key," returned Mrs. Latimer; and then there was a silence between them for a few moments, which Jacob broke by saying:

"I didn't know you wore glasses."

"Only for reading and writing," said Mrs. Latimer. "They are so very hideous." She picked up her spectacles, put them on, and looked at him through them.

"They are not the least hideous," said Jacob, smiling. Truly he thought they were an improvement; there was something about those glassy, expressionless eyes of hers which rather repulsed him.

"I think they are horrible," replied Mrs. Latimer sharply; and she took off her spectacles, folded them, and hid them in their usual drawer. Jacob's answer had not been the one she had desired.

During tea she chaffed him gaily about his laziness, his lack of observation, and his failure to understand women — all apropos of the revision of his novel.

Jacob wondered what had put her in such good spirits. He thought her laughter was a little foolish, and most of her criticisms of himself quite beside the point and uncalled for.

"I don't think you're very just this afternoon," he remonstrated once, when she taunted him with a lack of application.

"Oh, you've quite a good enough opinion of yourself," she replied — an answer which added to Jacob's resentment. "I wish she wouldn't cackle," was the bitter thought in his mind.

4.

After tea they sat with the lamps unlit.

"Are you going to tell me some of your history now?" asked Mrs. Latimer.

Jacob was still a little resentful. "Oh, it wouldn't interest you," he said. "Besides, I ought to be going soon. I expect you have a lot of packing to do before Thursday."

"No," returned Mrs. Latimer quietly. "I have been very busy the last few days, so that I might be free to-day; but, of course, if you have anything else to do . . ."

"I don't know why you are so kind to me," murmured Jacob. He responded at once to the extraordinarily friendly spirit which was evidenced in that last statement of hers. Nevertheless he was puzzled. He could not understand why she should have made fun of him over the tea-table — he had been more than a little hurt by one or two of her shafts — if she really took such pleasure in his society that she had deliberately planned to keep this evening free for his entertainment. The only explanation that occurred to him was that she was a curious person, and that he did not in the least understand her.

"I really don't know why you are so good to me," he repeated reflectively, staring into the fire.

Mrs. Latimer made no reply to his expressions of

wonder. For two or three minutes they sat in silence — a thing unprecedented during their acquaintance. Somewhere in the building someone was playing hymn-tunes.

"Oh, that horrible piano!" said Mrs. Latimer at last impatiently.

Jacob pulled himself together. He had been thinking of his own life-story, not of his surroundings or his companion. "Does it worry you?" he asked.

"I wish they would not play those depressing hymns," replied Mrs. Latimer. "Never mind; I'll try to forget."

"I find it a little difficult to begin," said Jacob. "Perhaps I needn't go back quite to the beginning."

"Oh, please," said Mrs. Latimer; "I want to hear it all now."

He did not make a very good story of his reminiscences, but it seemed to interest his hearer. She sat quite still, leaning back in her chair, and protecting her face from the fire with a little hand-screen. Every now and again she asked some question, but for the most part she listened in absolute silence.

He began at the beginning, as he had been encouraged to do, and Mrs. Latimer shivered when he gave her an account of the accident in his babyhood which had crippled him for the first fifteen years of his life. He went on to tell her of how his aunt, that dear, admirable Aunt Hester, had set him on his legs again, and how she had worked for him and lived for him. He had had many twinges of conscience with regard to his own ingratitude to Aunt Hester, and he did not stint his praises of her, nor withhold from her the credit that was due to her untiring devotion.

Then he came to Madeline and hesitated. He decided to give no names. Madeline appeared in his story as "someone," and he bungled the account of

his relations with her, so that it was by no means clear whether he had ever cared for her.

"She was only a child?" put in Mrs. Latimer, as he fumbled over his description of this phase of his experience.

"Yes, quite a child," agreed Jacob. "And then, of course, I came up to London and went into an architect's office."

"Did you write to her — to this 'someone'?" put in Mrs. Latimer.

"No, no, I never wrote to her, or she to me."

"And were you very broken-hearted, poor boy?" Mrs. Latimer had inferred that the entanglement was the simplest of boy and girl love affairs.

"Oh no. I don't think so," replied Jacob. "And then — oh, well, I was in this architect's office for a long time, and nothing particular happened, till I — I met Mrs. Wilmot."

The screen was hiding Mrs. Latimer's face when Jacob looked up, and she gave him no assistance. He had an instinct that the incidents which were to follow would not be altogether agreeable to her; but it was only an instinct, he could have given no reason for his hesitation.

He plunged. "She was a widow," he said — a euphemism which he thought permissible —"and somehow or other we got engaged." Then he hedged and began a description of how he had set up as an architect on his own account, and of how he had failed.

"Was that why your engagement was broken off?" asked Mrs. Latimer suddenly.

"It wasn't broken off," replied Jacob. "We were married before I started in practice." He waited for another question to be asked, but none came, the hand-screen was still interposed between

them, and when the silence was broken, Mrs. Latimer only said, "Well, go on."

If he had blundered over his earlier history, he made an even greater mess of the account of his marriage, of his failure to find happiness, and of his second intrigue with Madeline, "the first one, you know, that I knew before in the country, when she was a child." He felt that it all sounded horribly unconvincing and crude, and he went back and touched it up a little, adding detail here and there. Still there was silence, and he was faced with the uninteresting back of the hand-screen, an old-fashioned thing worked in crewels, that presented a strangely unnatural bird seated on a spray of twigs that was much too small for it.

"It's not a very pretty story, is it?" asked Jacob at last.

"Is she — is your wife dead?" asked Mrs. Latimer.

"Oh no; Mr. Barker wanted us to make it up, but she wouldn't."

"Why don't you divorce her?"

"Well, I don't think I could. You see, I was guilty as well."

"Do you ever see the other one now?"

"No, never. That was the beginning of the story I told you this afternoon. I met her in the Park and she cut me dead."

Mrs. Latimer suddenly rose to her feet. "Excuse me one moment," she said, her face averted, "I want to see if Martha has gone out yet." She left the room quickly, taking no notice of Jacob's remark that he had heard Martha go out a long time ago.

For some time he sat quietly brooding over the story he had been telling. It was certainly true, as

he had said, that it was not a pretty story. Then he began to fidget; Mrs. Latimer was a long time. He looked at his watch and found it was nearly eight o'clock. They usually had supper at half-past seven; the supper which Martha laid in the dining-room before she went out. He picked up the hand-screen and studied the outline of the unnatural bird, threw it down with a gesture of disgust, and went over to the window. The blinds had not been drawn, and for some minutes he peered out at the uninteresting gas-lit street below. It was raining steadily, and there were very few people about.

He sat down by the fire and wondered what he ought to do. It was very embarrassing. Perhaps Mrs. Latimer was ill. He went to the door, opened it, and listened. There was not a sound to be heard except the ticking of the grandfather's clock in the little hall. He went back into the room, leaving the door open. It was very dark in there, the fire had died down to a dull red glow. He decided to light the tall standard lamp which stood in the corner. That was soon accomplished, and the light was a relief. Still Mrs. Latimer did not return. He began to grow irritable. What an extraordinary woman she was! What on earth could be the matter with her?

He turned to the door again, intent on making an exploration of the flat — she might have fainted or done something equally eccentric — and met her on the threshold. She had moved so quietly that he had not heard her coming. He started. "I beg your pardon," he said, "I was just coming to look for you. I was afraid you might be ill."

"It's nothing. I was too hot by the fire, I think. I felt faint. I wonder if you would excuse my not coming in to supper?"

"Of course. I'll go. Unless you would sooner not be left alone. Can I get you a doctor or something?"

"No, no! It's nothing," said Mrs. Latimer. She was still standing in the darkness of the hall. "I shall be quite all right if I lie down. I'm sorry to be so inhospitable."

"Oh, please don't think of that," said Jacob. "Don't bother about me. I can let myself out."

She acquiesced in his proposal to make an instant departure; but she hovered near him while he put on his coat, and when he was ready she apologized again for her inhospitality.

"I suppose I shan't see you again before you go?" said Jacob.

"No, this is good-bye," returned Mrs. Latimer. She held his hand very tightly for a moment, and then dropped it quickly and turned away.

Jacob remembered that she had not given him her address in Italy, but he felt that he could not ask it then. He murmured "good-bye" again as he let himself out. He had a feeling that he had done something of which he ought to be ashamed.

5.

He set himself to analysis, as he sat over his lonely supper at his usual restaurant in the Euston Road. There was but one reasonable explanation of Mrs. Latimer's curious behaviour, and that explanation he refused to entertain. He could not and would not believe that she was in love with him, in the ordinary acceptation of the phrase. No, she liked him, undoubtedly, and he had disappointed her. He had shown her that he was not the sort of man she had believed him to be. "Oh, well"— he shrugged his

shoulders —" he couldn't help it. That was the sort of man he *had* been, and he had no intention of sailing under false colours."

"Does monsieur require anything more?" put in the waiter at this point, bill in hand.

"No, he's finished," replied Jacob, "absolutely finished."

The waiter smiled at monsieur's little joke — it was of a kind very familiar to him — and made out the bill.

One little significant piece of evidence recurred to Jacob later — the evidence of the spectacles. Why had she hidden them till to-day? Those spectacles explained the fact that she had always been reading his manuscript when he arrived — she did not want to refer to it in his presence, and looked up her points of criticism, so that they might be fresh in her memory when he came.

The hiding of the spectacles was due to vanity, of course. She was a curious creature!

He wondered whether he would see her again, and realized suddenly that he would miss her companionship, her sympathy and encouragement. Yes, he would miss them exceedingly. He decided that he would write to ask her to send him her address in Italy.

Finally, he felt sure that she could not possibly be in love with him. The idea was too ridiculous. . . .

He wrote his letter when he got home, but he received no answer until Friday morning. His answer was a parcel containing all the manuscript he had left at the flat, and a post-card bearing an address in Rome; nothing more, not even a signature.

CHAPTER XII

PLAYING THE GAME

1.

In January, Jacob thought that the time had come when he might safely ask for an increase of salary. He had a position in the office, and there was always plenty of work for him to do. Moreover, after various rejections by eminent firms, the cocoa scheme had been accepted by an enterprising company who had conceived the original idea of mixing cocoa with certain other ingredients, not specifically described, but all guaranteed to be "frame-building" and "sustaining." A new version of the "brain-food" scheme was now in hand, in preparation for a great "campaign"— as Hill and Farmer always spoke of it — in the autumn; a version into which many new principles had been introduced, but which retained Jacob's central inspiration as a pivot.

These causes for congratulation, evidences of his worth to the firm, were sufficient warrant, in Jacob's opinion, for demanding some substantial recognition of his services; but he would have hesitated to take the initiative had not his reluctant attention been brought to bear upon the fact that he was, according to precedent, living upon his capital. Half of the money he had received for his furniture was spent, and there was little to show for it save the accumulation of some twenty or thirty books. He found that in four months he had spent in ordinary expenses nearly forty pounds above his salary, and he

was compelled to admit that even if he practised severe economies, he would always be living above his present income while he remained in Torrington Square. It was true that he could check the impetus of that diminishing balance.

He had fallen into the habit of dining at a restaurant every evening, and he was thus often tempted to spend three, four, or even five shillings in order to purchase a sense of complacency. It was an antidote for loneliness. When he had dined satisfactorily in a restaurant that was frequented by interesting people, he could enjoy a comfortable hour watching the crowd, and find in this occupation material for most fascinating dreams. That indulgence must be stopped. He could go home nightly to tea and eggs, and the solace of the literature provided by Mr. Mudie, to whose library he was now a subscriber. But he saw quite clearly that the expense which ate up his income was the cost of these comfortable rooms in Torrington Square, and that luxury he would not deny himself. "Oh, my lord! I can't go back to a bed-sitting room," was Jacob's protest against the indications of common sense, and then, resolutely, "No, I'm hanged if I will!"

And thus goaded, he braced himself to make a demand of the all-powerful George P. Hill.

Jacob opened his case after an interview with his chief on matters of detail in connection with the great cocoa campaign. He had not been inspired that morning; he had been unable to furnish any bright and original suggestions, but he felt that he must take this opportunity; it was not often that he was thus alone with his employer.

"There's one thing more," said Jacob quickly, as Mr. Hill's hand reached out towards the bell which summoned his stenographer.

"Go ahead!" replied Mr. Hill, and, looking at Jacob, he knew at once what was intended by the "one thing."

"I've been here four months now . . ." began Jacob, but Mr. Hill interrupted him.

"Well, that's so," he said, "but don't forget that we've been teaching you your business. You're doin' well, but you're only a beginner. But there's big money in this business, and if you stick at it, I don't deny you may become useful to us. You come right here to me in six months' time, and I'll double your salary or give you notice to quit. It's just up to you, now, which it will be."

There was a finality about this pronouncement, and a certain logic behind it, which effectually dammed back the arguments that Jacob had had in readiness. He could not deny the justice of Mr. Hill's assertion that he had been teaching Jacob the business, and Jacob saw that he had been "rather cheeky" to ask for a rise so soon. In other circumstances he would have been well pleased with the prospect of a doubled salary in six months' time, but he hated the thought of those alternatives, the shrinking balance, or the bed-sitting room.

He returned to Mr. Farmer looking rather thoughtful. Farmer had been urging him "to go for a rise," had even said that he was fairly sure to get it. When he heard Jacob's report, Farmer sucked at his pipe and looked exceedingly wise.

"You never quite know where to have him," he remarked; "he's pretty fly, is George P."

"Quite true what he says, of course," said Jacob.

"Now, look here, my boy," said Farmer, after a moment of profound consideration, "d'you know what I should do?"

Jacob shook his head.

Mr. Farmer stuck out his fat little legs and regarded Jacob with an air of benevolence.

"D'you know G.L.S.?" he asked. "No? Not G. L. Samson? Oh, where 'ave you been brought up?" Farmer did not often omit his aspirates, and when he did it was generally done with an air of facetiousness. "G.L.S., my boy, is going to get there, and no mistake about it. He's It, according to his own account. The future president of the Pyramid Club, and the whole bag of tricks, and don't you forget it. Well, anyway, G.L.S. has just planted himself and a number one scheme on Price and Mallinson. . . ."

"The printers?" interpolated Jacob.

"Yep. He's going to show P. & M. the way a printer's business ought to be worked; put up a scheme to 'em that opened their eyes some, he told me."

"I don't quite see where I come in," said Jacob as Mr. Farmer stopped to relight his pipe. "I don't know much about printing."

"You won't need to," replied Farmer. "G.L.S. works it out that the man with the big printing business is the man to handle the advertisin' proposition, and he's going in to sell live printing direct to the customer that'll work off his goods like a charm, without botherin' the advertisin' agent at all. Samson's going to have a studio with real-alive black and white artists, and a copy department, and everything all complete, and then he's going out to save the manufacturer money."

"Doesn't sound a bad scheme," remarked Jacob reflectively —"advertising agent and printer all in one."

"Oh, it's all right," said Mr. Farmer. "Trust G.L.S. for that and you can gamble on it P. & M.

aren't going to send out the dollars unless they see their way to welcome them home with a family of kittens. P. & M. have got a lot of capital behind 'em, but they aren't chucking it away."

"You think I might get a better job with Price and Mallinson, then?" suggested Jacob.

"Worth trying in your place, anyway," said Farmer. "You don't stand to lose anything. I'll give you an intro. to G.L.S. if you care to have a shot."

"Oh, that's awfully good of you," replied Jacob.

"And look here," concluded Mr. Farmer: "when you see G.L.S. you've got to talk big. Don't forget to tell him you're the man to sell the goods, that's the kind of yelp he's on to. But he's on to style, too, and that's where you may come in. 'Distinctive Printing' is one of his gags. Gets-your-attention idea. Send out booklets and folders that are too good to be thrown away. See? He's hot stuff, is G.L.S."

"I'll certainly have a try," said Jacob, wondering whether he would ever be able to "talk big" to this remarkable Mr. Samson. "It's awfully good of you to put me up to it."

"That's all right," said Farmer. "I don't mind telling you I should have been on to G.L.S. myself if I hadn't got rather a snug thing here."

"I suppose I had better not say anything about it to the governor until I have got some sort of an offer?" asked Jacob innocently.

"Please yourself about that," replied Farmer. "It just depends how you feel about it."

"I don't see why I should," said Jacob.

"N — no," replied Farmer. "Anyway, I'll give you that intro. to G.L.S. if you feel like having a shot at him."

And again Jacob thanked Farmer warmly for his kindness.

2.

Mr. Samson replied, after an interval of four days, to Jacob's letter asking for an interview. He had enclosed Mr. Farmer's introduction, which was type-written and distinctly eulogistic. Mr. Samson's communication was brief. It ran: "Dear Mr. Stahl, I will see you on Tuesday at 11.45. Yours, etc., G. L. Samson, Comptroller" p.p.— some indecipherable hieroglyphic. The heading of the paper was in two colours, and bore the name of the firm in a neat oval, supported by what are known as "swags"— a classic ornament representing stout wreaths of flowers, dependent from their ends and drooping in a curve between their extremities.

"Distinctive printing," murmured Jacob. The heading was, undoubtedly, effective, even artistic. Detail had been considered; the necessary information as to telephone numbers had been treated as a part of the design.

When he arrived at the office, Jacob showed Mr. Samson's note to Farmer, who regarded the heading critically. "'Igh art in 'eadings," he remarked. "Letter head's too good to be thrown away. This is something new. Ten quid to the artist for the design — you can work it out at about thirty-five bob a thousand on the first five thousand. Very choice, but who's goin' to pay the price?"

"Is that very much?" asked Jacob who, as yet, knew nothing of prices.

"Oh! What —'o!" replied Farmer, from which Jacob understood that the price was prohibitive.

"Don't forget what I told you about talking

big," was Farmer's last word of advice, as Jacob went out "to lunch" at half-past eleven.

3.

Messrs. Price and Mallinson's printing works were south of the river, and Jacob thought the occasion justified a cab. It took him over Blackfriars Bridge and then turned eastwards into the slums of Southwark.

"It's a ghastly place to get to," meditated Jacob. He heard the driver making inquiries of a policeman for Pennyquick Place.

"Price and Mallinson's?" returned the policeman, and gave the driver a direction.

"I wonder how he knew," was Jacob's mental comment, but when he at last arrived at Pennyquick Place, he found that the whole of it was occupied by Price and Mallinson's factory, which, indeed, put out long, thrusting arms into the backs of other places and courts.

Outside, Price and Mallinson's was a great barrack with huge windows that ran up continuously without the usual interposition of masonry between the head of one window and the sill of the one above. Jacob, regarding the building with an architect's eye, wondered how this construction was effected, and what took the weight of the floors.

Inside, the factory was untidy, noisy, and smelt intolerably of oil and turpentine.

Jacob, when he had found the public entrance with some difficulty — it bore no mark to distinguish it from various other entrances — pushed open one of a pair of folding doors which swung against the resistance of a spring so strong that he was nearly pinched between the two leaves. He found himself

at the end of a large "shop," lighted partly by skylights, in which a number of young women and a few men were busily working at long tables or counters that stretched across the width of the room. From these he was fenced off by two broad counters, at right angles to one another, that enclosed the corner by the door.

He hesitated, imagining that he must have made another mistake, despite the confident direction of the young man in a long apron and shirt sleeves whom he had met outside, and then remembered that he had come to this bewildering place to "talk big," and braced himself to make a beginning at once. "Even the vicar told me to have more self-confidence," he reflected.

An authoritative bang upon the counter did not produce any immediate result, but a repetition of the summons induced a young man, working in a large glazed box at one end of the counter to look round the edge and say, rather indifferently, "Well, what is it?"

"I want to see Mr. Samson," said Jacob firmly. "I have an appointment with him for a quarter to twelve."

"What name?" asked the clerk, putting his pen behind his ear, and coming, reluctantly, out of his box.

"Stahl," returned Jacob—"J. L. Stahl. Here is Mr. Samson's letter."

The clerk took the letter, read it, and disappeared without further remark.

Jacob was left suffering from all the symptoms of a nervous patient awaiting the arrival of the surgeons — cold shivers, a feeling of sickness, and an intense desire to be out of it at any cost. And he had come to "talk big"!

"See you directly," remarked the clerk when he returned, and retired to his box again.

Jacob amused himself by studying the occupations of the girls in the workshop — they appeared to be packers — but this amusement was terminated by the sound of a steam hooter, the signal for a general exit.

Jacob looked at his watch and found that it was twelve o'clock.

Another quarter of an hour elapsed before a young and rather pretty girl suddenly put in an appearance and after looking round at the empty workshop, came up to the counter.

"Mr. Stall?" she inquired, looking at Jacob; and then, "Will you come this way?"

Jacob lifted the counter-flap — he understood counter-flaps now — and followed the young woman up a flight of rude wooden stairs to the first floor. He noticed that she had pretty feet and ankles. No one could have failed to notice it.

4.

The transition from the rest of the factory to the "show-room" and Mr. Samson's private office was an experience. One moment Jacob was in a rough, bare barn; the next he had passed into a luxurious art gallery, hung with framed specimens of "distinctive printing," especially the finer examples of lithography, some of them printed, so he learned later, in as many as twenty-two colours. One glazed case contained an illustration of the method of superimposition of these colours, beginning with the faintest adumbration of a yellow lady by a stile, and showing her development step by step as one colour after another was added, until she stood complete in

every detail, prepared to simper at you from the presentation plate of a Christmas number. Jacob would have liked to pause and study this interesting exposition of the lithographic method.

Mr. Samson's office was no less glorious than the show-room. Here, too, were framed expositions of the art of distinctive printing, but these were the artists' original drawings. On the floor was a fine Turkey carpet, and when Jacob was asked to sit down he sank into an armchair covered in saddle-bag.

Mr. Samson was a surprisingly young man, certainly not more than thirty-three or four, with a big, powerful frame, rather clumsy features, and brown eyes.

"You wrote to me," was his terse opening.

Jacob admitted the fact, and there the conversation halted for a moment. Jacob was reminding himself that he had to "talk big," but no ideas presented themselves.

Mr. Samson thrust his hands into his jacket pockets and leaned back in his chair. He had looked at Jacob when he came in, but now he kept his attention on a study in sepia that hung on the wall opposite his desk.

"You're with Fletcher and Hill," was Mr. Samson's next affirmation, and again Jacob admitted Mr. Samson's accuracy.

"What's your proposition?"

This was an opening undoubtedly. Here was Jacob's opportunity to give forth his opinions on advertising and the possibilities it presented, and more particularly to show clearly and definitely that the future of Price and Mallinson's depended almost entirely upon the engagement of Jacob Stahl. He saw the speech in his mind's eye; he could have written it convincingly, but he had not the impudence to

speak it. Instead of oratory he fell back on his introducer.

"Mr. Farmer told me you were looking for a man who could write good copy," he said. He even patted himself imaginatively on the back for having said "*good* copy."

"How long have you been with Hill?" asked Mr. Samson, still intent on the subject for reproduction by the half-tone process.

"Since September," replied Jacob.

"Why're you leaving?"

"Well, I'm not," said Jacob. "At least, not unless I can get a better job."

"Got any specimens of your copy?"

"No; I'm afraid I haven't brought any with me."

"What d'you make of that?" Mr. Samson picked up a long folded card, known as a "folder," and pushed it over to Jacob.

The folder advertised the advantages of the newly-introduced St. Cecilia auto-piano. On one leaf was a reproduction of a cleverly executed sketch representing a company of people listening with charmed attention to the performance of a small child who was operating the "St. Cecilia." On another leaf was what looked like an excellent photograph of the instrument itself, and two other leaves were covered with letterpress, printed in a rather stilted type, divided into paragraphs of about five lines each, separated by tiny tail-pieces. The "make-up" of the thing was excellent. Jacob saw at once that this was a piece of printing too good to be thrown away.

"It's a thing no one could help looking at," replied Jacob.

"Have you read the letterpress?"

Jacob read it quickly, and found it too florid for his taste. "It's all adjectives," he said critically.

"It wouldn't make me want to buy a 'St. Cecilia.'"

"What'd you have put?" asked Mr. Samson, smiling.

"I should have described the uses of the thing, from the points of view of various people, and how it enabled anyone to enjoy music of any kind without the fag of learning to play the piano."

"H'm!" returned Mr. Samson. "I wrote the letterpress."

Jacob blushed. "I still stick to my opinion," he said — it was no use hedging now. "With an expensive thing like that, you are appealing to educated people who won't read mere puffs; you want to get them interested."

"They won't read anything," returned Mr. Samson.

"Oh, I don't know," protested Jacob; "if it's put before them properly, they will."

Mr. Samson smiled grimly. "What salary d'you expect?" he asked.

Farmer had told Jacob not to be too modest when this subject was mooted. He had said that G.L.S. would be just as likely to give ten pounds a week as two. But Jacob felt that he could not reasonably ask for ten pounds, so he split the difference and said: "I should want six pounds a week."

"Oh, well, I'll let you know," returned Mr. Samson abruptly. "Good-day." And he returned to his work, leaving Jacob to collect his hat, stick, and gloves and find his own way out.

5.

When a report of this all too brief interview was made to Farmer, he screwed up one corner of his mouth, a facial contortion which gave him the ap-

pearance of having a swollen face and indicated temper.

"You've mucked it," was Farmer's only comment. He brushed his swaggering silk hat with great attention, put it on the side of his head, and went out to lunch.

Jacob was bound to admit that Farmer had said all that was necessary.

The days passed, and he heard nothing from Mr. Samson. Farmer explained that the promise to "let you know" was a *cliché* whose only significance Jacob had already learned.

On the following Monday Jacob was specially summoned to Mr. Hill's private office, and for one ecstatic moment he hoped that his chief had changed his intention with regard to an increase of salary.

Mr. Hill disillusioned him at once.

"I hear you're looking after another job," he said, directly Jacob had closed the door.

Jacob grew hot. He felt that his cheeks were flaming. He realized then, for the first time, that he had not played quite fairly with Mr. Hill.

"Yes," he murmured; "as I told you, I want a higher salary."

Mr. Hill waived that point for the moment. "Now, don't you reckon you'd have been playing fairer with me if you had advised me before you went to see Samson?" he asked.

Jacob knew perfectly well that Mr. Hill would not have "advised" *his* employer in similar circumstances; he guessed, also, that Mr. Hill would have no qualms as to whether his own play was strictly "fair" in any matter of business. But, then, Mr. Hill's standards were not Jacob's, and Jacob was conscious of having fallen below his own standard. He was not business-like; he had no wish to be.

"No, I suppose it was not quite playing the game," he said.

"Well, no," returned Mr. Hill; "and you can see that I can't afford to teach you my business just to have you touting round my ideas to the first buyer."

"Oh, come, it's hardly that," expostulated Jacob.

"Near enough," replied Mr. Hill. "Now, I don't mind telling you that if you hadn't come here on Mr. Gray's introduction, I should have had my clerk pay you a month's salary and shown you the door; but I'll give you the choice between that and a six months' contract on our present terms. You can let me know which way you'll have it to-morrow."

Jacob shrugged his shoulders. Why should he be offended at Hill's unjust insinuations or at his bullying manner? Hill was playing his game, the business game. He had played it badly on this occasion because he thought Jacob was a worthy opponent, who used the same weapons as himself; if he had been decent about it, Jacob would have given in at once. Jacob felt sure that Hill wanted to keep him, but he did not mean now to submit so easily.

"Very well," he said; "I'll let you know my decision to-morrow."

Mr. Hill nodded and returned to his letters.

"By the way," said Jacob, "might I ask who told you that I had been to see Mr. Samson?"

"No," replied Mr. Hill, "you can't."

Farmer put on his swelled-face expression when he was told of the offer of a six months' contract. He had been very engrossed in his work when Jacob entered, and had volunteered no remark until he was addressed.

"You'll grab that, I suppose?" said Farmer.

"I wouldn't if I could do better," returned Jacob.

"Why don't you go and see Samson again before you sign on?" was Farmer's next suggestion.

"Hardly worth the fag of trotting all down there after what he said."

"You might catch him at their Strand offices. Samson's going to move his show-room to the partner's offices. Says it's too far to get people to go down to Southwark to see pictures."

"Where are the Strand offices?" asked Jacob.

"Just opposite St. Clement Danes. You can't miss 'em. Price and Mallinson's is on the ground-floor, but Samson's going to take the whole of the first-floor for show-room and offices. He's a plunger. Licks me how P. and M. give in to him."

"I might look in at lunch-time," said Jacob.

"Worth trying," returned Farmer. "I'll come with you if you like."

"Oh, good! Will you really? That's jolly decent of you," said Jacob eagerly. He wouldn't mind going if Farmer were with him.

6.

Farmer's treatment of the situation was an object-lesson.

He strolled into Messrs. Price and Mallinson's rather elaborate offices, with his boastful silk hat well on the side of his head, looked at the young clerk who immediately came forward to learn his wishes, with careless contempt, and said, "Mr. Samson upstairs?" in a tone which implied a lifelong intimacy with that new light of the firm.

"I believe he is, sir; I'll inquire," said the clerk suavely.

Mr. Samson was upstairs, and Farmer and Jacob were ushered into the presence without any reference

to Mr. Samson's wishes on the subject — his willingness to accord an interview.

He was supervising the preparation of the showroom, his hands in his pockets and his bowler hat on the back of his head, explaining his precise desires at great length to the foreman, and meeting all objections with vigorous expressions of determination to have things his own way.

"Hello!" said Farmer carelessly. "We've just looked in to see how things are going on, don't you know!"

Samson grinned. "We haven't started yet," he said; "there's nothing to see."

"Room for a big chunk of distinctive printing here," commented Farmer. "How are you going to lay it out?"

Samson explained, warming to his work, and Farmer commented and criticized. Some of his criticisms were so apt that Samson seemed inclined to profit by them.

Jacob followed them round in silence. Samson had included him in the nod with which he had greeted Farmer, but had taken no further notice of his presence.

Presently Farmer turned to Jacob and winked ostentatiously. "He's going to make Fletcher and Hill spit blood, my boy," he said. "We'd better look out for a new job."

Samson laughed. "You're staying on, then?" he said to Jacob.

"Hill offered him a six months' contract this morning," replied Farmer.

"The trouble with me is," said Samson, "that there isn't enough copy wanted yet to make it worth while to take on a man for that only. I was going to write to you to-day."

"Telling me you'd no use for me, I suppose," said Jacob.

"Well, not at the moment," replied Samson. "In a month or two's time. . . ."

Farmer had propped himself against a packing-case and lighted a cigarette. "Just bear in mind, you won't get him then, my boy," he put in. "Hill's got his eye on Mr. Stahl; thinks he's found a treasure."

Samson released one hand from his pockets and scratched his head.

"Shouldn't have thought he had room for two treasures," he said.

Farmer grinned complacently. "Just so," he said, with a wink.

Jacob did not at the moment gather the point of Farmer's innuendo, but Samson did. Farmer was jealous of Stahl's ascendency. Jacob could have had no better recommendation.

"I don't know whether you'd care to take on a mixed job," said Samson to Jacob. "I'm putting on three or four special travellers for country work. Could you superintend them from here and back them with ideas and copy? You'll have me behind you, and the studio."

Jacob hesitated. The thought of this utterly unknown work frightened him. Would he be competent? He had not the vaguest idea what would be required of him.

Samson misread the hesitation. "I don't know that I could pay you more than five pounds a week," he said.

Five pounds a week! He could live comfortably on that. He had picked up the advertising business quickly enough; he would soon get the hang of this new activity. And Samson knew that it would be

new work for him. What he wanted was more self-confidence.

"Yes, I could take that on," said Jacob, mustering his forces. "It only means helping the travellers to sell printing, I suppose?"

"That's the idea," returned Samson.

"When would you want me to come?"

"Whenever you like," replied Samson carelessly. He considered that matter settled; he was free now to turn his mind to other plans.

Farmer understood. "Well, so long, old chap," he said. "Come along, Stahl."

Samson nodded familiarly and returned to the foreman.

"I wonder what Hill will say?" said Jacob, when he and Farmer were in the Strand again.

"That won't matter to you, anyway," replied Farmer.

"It's jolly good of you to have helped me like this," said Jacob. "Will you come and have lunch with me? We'll have a bottle of fizz or something to celebrate the occasion."

"Right-oh!" said Mr. Farmer.

7.

Mr. Hill was not at all disturbed when Jacob told him that he could not accept the six months' contract.

"Fixed it up with Samson?" he said. "Well, get right on with that cocoa scheme. I suppose you'll stay till the end of the month?"

"Certainly," returned Jacob.

On the whole, he was rather elated when he left the office that evening. He was on the way to make money. He could stay on in Torrington Square now, but he did not intend to spend as much as he

had been spending lately. When he was earning five pounds a week he would make up that balance of his again. He would give up his expensive dinners and go home to tea and eggs. He ought to be able to save at least thirty shillings every week.

He made a beginning at once. He had had a substantial and invigorating lunch in the middle of the day that had cost him seventeen shillings. That was Farmer's commission. Farmer had been a brick.

After tea Jacob fell to pondering many things. He wondered whether the Vicar would say that he had behaved badly to Mr. Hill. Probably. But Hill had taken it all as a matter of course. When he had found that Jacob had played the business game successfully, Hill had probably respected him. It was only when he had hoped to keep Jacob on at a low salary that Hill pretended to have been unfairly dealt with.

That was the way one played the business game. You couldn't afford to consider the interests of other people unless they coincided with your own hand. You played for your own hand, and you must never consider the sensibilities of your adversaries. Consideration, as one generally understood the word, must not enter your mind.

That was all very well, and business men like Hill treated you with more respect when you had played the game successfully, even to their own disadvantage; but it was not a game Jacob wanted to play. He felt no glow of achievement as a consequence of having scored off Hill; he felt as if he had done rather a mean thing — something that he would not care to describe to the Vicar or Mrs. Latimer. He had no wish to score off people who had been decent to him, as Hill had been, and he hoped that he would never be obliged to do it again. . . .

He wondered why Farmer had taken so much trouble to help a man with whom he had never been on terms of friendship. Surely Farmer played the business game? Jacob had certainly gathered as much from Farmer's conversation. Perhaps he was one of those people who boasted of their callousness in order to hide the good nature of which they were, for some reason, ashamed.

Thinking of Farmer, Jacob began to recall various of his *obiter dicta*, such as, "Look out for yourself, my boy; if you don't, nobody else will;" or, "When you've got hold of a good thing, take jolly good care that the other fellow doesn't get his fingers on to it." Making application of this latter dictum, Jacob was struck with a sudden idea. Had Farmer wanted to be rid of a possible rival in the firm of Fletcher and Hill?

It was a beautiful solution to the problem; it answered every difficulty — and, why, of course, when Farmer had heard of the result of that first interview with Samson, he had given the show away to Mr. Hill. That was mean. But the humour of it appealed to Jacob. He laughed out loud in his solitude. How Farmer had been done when the offer of a six months' contract had been made; and, by Jove! how he had worked to get Jacob into Price and Mallinson's sooner than have that contract signed!

Oh yes, Farmer played the business game, and played it well. And what a mug he must consider Jacob Stahl!

Jacob Stahl did not mind in this instance, however. He had been pushed into a better position, as it happened. He wondered whether he would have forgiven Farmer so readily in other circumstances? If he had got the sack, for instance?

That was a question to which he found no convincing reply.

His last thought was that he need have no qualms about his own ingratitude; he had only been a puppet. It was Farmer who had pulled the strings.

CHAPTER XIII

PRICE AND MALLINSON'S

1.

Jacob had only received one letter from Mrs. Latimer since she had been in Rome. That had been an answer to a discursive essay of his, written three weeks after she had left London, in which he had hinted that his novel was making little progress.

The palimpsest had been very obvious in that letter of Mrs. Latimer's. The handwriting confessed the influence of an earlier school. The "fine Italian hand" of our grandmothers was, without question, the original model, but the character had been enlarged, was less stilted, had lost much of its prim particularity. The matter of the letter had been in keeping. Mrs. Latimer had made but the briefest reference to Jacob's essay, a passing note of regret that he had not "persevered with his writing"—a phrase that was reminiscent of the governess. The remainder had been devoted to talk of Rome and Roman society as it was known to the writer, and conveyed the suggestion that Mrs. Latimer was moving in literary circles which sometimes intersected the circumference of other and inferentially still more elect circles. So-and-so's palazzo (she used many Italian words, an aggravation to Jacob) was referred to, and other magnificences by suggestion to the uninitiate, who might understand a palace to intend a royal dwelling-place, nor ever guess that a Roman palazzo might be let in flats.

Jacob had not been interested. He found a vein of snobbery in the letter which aggravated him little less than the uses of Italian words to designate things which had quite appropriate English names. Why should she write "an exquisite marble bagno," for instance? Was there any special significance in the word which differentiated it from the English "bath"?

That reference had been more typical than Jacob had realized. After describing her "bagno," Mrs. Latimer had been smitten with the fear that Jacob would not understand so brazen a reference to an act of the toilet which one had not openly discussed in the cloisters. To avoid any misapprehension, she had gone on to explain that in Rome the subject was freely referred to, and she rounded up her explanation by mentioning that the Italian man-servant wished her "a happy bath" (Italian again in the original) as she entered the apartment in which that luxury had been prepared for her. "They are such a delightful people," was her final comment under this head.

"She's so quaintly early-Victorian in some ways," had been Jacob's criticism, his first clear vision of the palimpsest.

He had left this letter unanswered for a month, but one Sunday morning he had had an inspiration to write — something; he hardly knew what, but certainly not his novel. Phrases had come into his mind without effort; his thoughts had run clear and fresh. So he had sat down and written to Mrs. Latimer, another discursive essay of which he had been rather proud; it had seemed to him quite a brilliant effort, containing many ideas well expressed. He had made little reference to Mrs. Latimer's letter to himself, and that little he had considered as the one blot on

the style of his epistle — it had been in a different, more colloquial vein.

The answer to this second essay came a few days after his definitive interview with Mr. Samson. It began, "Amico mio, tanti grazie for your long screed," but after this aggravation it developed into a criticism of the matter of Jacob's letter. She had, apparently, taken it as a serious literary effort, and noted one or two turns of expression to which she objected. Jacob shrugged his shoulders over the criticisms, and became in turn the critic. "She finds fault with me for an obvious oversight," he thought, "but she makes mistakes in her own grammar. 'All those kind of things' isn't English." Nevertheless, he was pleased with this second letter of Mrs. Latimer's; it had shown an interest in him. "I expect I shall see her again when she comes back to town," he reflected, and was not displeased with the prospect. The next Sunday morning he wrote a few more pages of his novel, and in the evening he answered her letter and told her of his new prospects.

2.

He began his new work at Price and Mallinson's early in February. He had written to Samson suggesting a date, and after an interval of six days, during which time he had become increasingly anxious — his appointment had been such a casual affair — he received an answer confirming his engagement and accepting his suggested date. Three lines included these two essentials, and Jacob noted that the spelling of his name was still incorrect.

His first few days in the new business were partly occupied by strange and varied duties, and partly were not occupied to all. There was no place for

him to work at the Southwark factory, and the Strand offices were not yet fit for occupation, so he was assigned a small table in the partly dismantled show-room, and told that the services of the pretty typist would be at his disposal when she was not otherwise engaged.

Jacob had learned by bitter experience that when no work was put before him, it was essential to find work — to make it, if none was to be found. He knew his own weakness in this connection, and intended to fight it.

Samson was very preoccupied. He was engrossed at the moment in the detail of the new offices and show-room. He scratched his head when Jacob was shown into the office at nine o'clock, and his first remark was that office hours were normally from 9.30 till 6 — a distinct relief to Jacob, who found Pennyquick Court a long journey from Torrington Square. That morning he had taken a bus from Holborn to the top of Queen Street, and walked from there, by way of Southwark Bridge.

"What do you want me to start on this morning?" asked Jacob.

"I haven't engaged your travellers yet," returned Samson. "I've had one advertisement in, but the answers were no good. Try your hand at an ad.— an attractive one. I want some good men; I want to get some experienced men away from other firms."

"What salary are you offering?"

"Don't mention the amount. Say salary and commission. You get on with that. I'll see you again before I go up to the Strand." And he mentioned that Miss Forrest would be at Jacob's disposal, as if she was an article of office furniture.

Jacob was conscious of a sense of importance as he sat down at his little table in the show-room. He

felt that he was one of the principals in this business, a man who had certain inferiors at his beck and call. Also he was conscious of nervousness. He had never dictated a letter to a typist; he felt that it would be an ordeal.

After one or two attempts, he drafted an advertisement for country travellers which he thought was certain to produce replies, and then sat chafing, waiting for further occupation. He did not want to interrupt Mr. Samson again; he knew that it was not business to interrupt one's chief continually by asking for precise instructions. One must have initiative.

He made a tour of the showroom, and examined carefully the exposition of the lithographic method of superimposing colours. He was intent on this study, when Samson burst out of his office with his hat on.

"Filthy thing!" said Samson, indicating the specimen of lithography. "Here, I've done an advertisement for those travellers."

"So have I," returned Jacob. He went over to his table, and presented it to his principal.

Samson read it, and threw it down on the table.

"Do you prefer your own?" asked Jacob.

"I'll put 'em both in, in different papers," returned Samson, with a smile; "we'll see which gets the best answers. Here, the St. Cecilia people want another folder. Tell Miss Forrest to get you their letter and have a shot at it. I'll be back after lunch." He was gone before Jacob had time to reply.

Jacob rather liked Samson. There was a humanity about him which had been lacking in Farmer and Hill. If Samson were a business man, he was of a different type.

Miss Forrest brought him the Auto-piano Com-

pany's letter, and the design for the new folder engrossed him for the rest of the morning. His architectural training had made him an expert in the use of his pencil, and he not only wrote a description of the thing, he also made a "dummy" and suggested the sketch and the "lay-out" for the type.

He had lunch in a public-house — beer and bread and cheese — the restaurants of Southwark were impossible — but when he returned Mr. Samson had not put in an appearance. Jacob spent half an hour touching up his suggestion to the folder, and instructed Miss Forrest to type his written description, which she did very neatly. Jacob thought her distinctly attractive, but he was on his dignity as a principal, very stern and reserved, and when she ventured to remark that she would not be sorry when the Strand offices were ready for occupation, he replied distantly: "No, things are rather upset here at present."

At half-past two Miss Forrest had a telephone message from the Strand to say that Mr. Samson would not be back in Southwark that afternoon — a communication which she passed on to Jacob. That fretted him; he really wanted to work, but he did not know what to do. He thought of getting out an alternative design for the folder, but he was so well pleased with the first one that he could think of no way to better it. At last he had an inspiration. He had come into a printer's business; it was his duty to learn something of the practical side of printing. He laid the typewritten description and "rough-out" of his folder on Mr. Samson's desk, and set out on a voyage of exploration.

He made a friend of the head of the lithographic department at the outset — an oldish man, named Johns, who had been in the firm's employment for forty-five years. Johns explained the whole proced-

ure in detail to Jacob, who found it engrossingly interesting. Price and Mallinson's chief business at that time was the printing of labels, posters, and coloured plates by lithography; the great letterpress department was Mr. Samson's introduction.

At half-past four, however, Jacob met with a check. A very tall, clean-shaven young man of seven or eight-and-twenty, with a common, handsome face, came into the lithographic studio, in which Mr. Johns was explaining to Jacob the method of drawing the design upon the "stones." Jacob was particularly fascinated by the care taken in the "stipple," by which the gradations of shadow were obtained. The newcomer looked at Jacob, and then said brusquely:

"Now then, what are you doing 'ere?"

"Mr. Blaise, the works manager," whispered old Johns. (Jacob learned later that the works manager was familiarly known in the factory as "Hell-and-Blazes"; he was a newcomer, an importation of Mr. Samson's.)

"I was just looking round the works," replied Jacob pacifically.

"It's against the rules," snapped Mr. Blaise, staring Jacob out of countenance. "What are yer — one of the new travellers?"

"No," replied Jacob, flushing, "I'm not. I will get Mr. Samson's permission. I didn't know it was required."

"You don't want Mr. Samson's permission; you want mine," returned Blaise. "Are you in the firm?"

"Yes," said Jacob; "I am going to supervise the country travellers."

"Well, travellers aren't allowed in the works," replied Blaise. "You're wasting Mr. Johns' time and

your own." And with that he turned his back and stalked out.

Jacob could have killed him. "I'm not going to take any notice of that vulgar brute," he said to Johns; "I know Mr. Samson will give me permission to go over the works." It was not a wise speech, but Jacob's temper was up.

"I think, perhaps, it would be better, till you have Mr. Samson's permission . . ." said old Johns nervously.

"Oh, very well," replied Jacob shortly; and then, realizing that he was being rude to his polite friend, he added: "Perhaps, some other day, when I have got permission, you will show me the rest of the work. I find it all intensely interesting."

"Certainly, certainly," said old Johns.

Jacob wasted another hour, fretting, in the showroom, and then went home.

3.

He met Mr. Samson downstairs the next morning, supervising the arrival of some new machinery. He nodded to Jacob, and opened conversation by saying: "New presses coming in; I'm wondering whether the floors are strong enough."

"Well, I could advise you about that," said Jacob. "I had ten years' training as an architect."

"Come along," said Mr. Samson.

On the second floor they met Blaise.

"Mr. Stall," said Samson, indicating Jacob; "he's going to test the floors for us."

Blaise stared. "What's he know about floors?" he asked rudely.

"I was an architect before I went into business," said Jacob. He was willing to propitiate Blaise this

morning; he hated to be at loggerheads with anyone, and he saw that Blaise's path and his own would often cross.

Blaise sneered. "Well, let's see what you know about it," he remarked.

"Have I your permission to inspect the floors?" asked Jacob ironically. This man was unbearable.

Mr. Samson looked uncomfortable. "What do you want to know?" he asked, alluding to the floors.

"I found Mr. Stall going over the works yesterday," put in Blaise, "and I told him it was against the rules. He didn't seem to believe me."

"I wanted to understand the practical working of the business," explained Jacob.

"Oh, that's all right," said Samson, drawing his eyebrows together. "You can let Mr. Stall look round, Blaise."

"It interferes with business and wastes time," said Blaise. Samson frowned, but Blaise stood his ground, returning the frown with a rude stare.

"You'd better ask me when you want to go into the works," Samson said to Jacob; he spoke impatiently. "What about these floors?"

"Where are the machines going, and what do they weigh?" asked Jacob.

"There are two big Miehles coming in, and they'll have to stand clear all round," said Samson. "What do they weigh, Blaise?"

"I dunno," returned Blaise, with a scowl.

"Well, I can easily find that out later," returned Jacob. "We shall have to look at the floor from below, and I shall want a tape to get the bearing of the joists, and a rule to measure the scantlings." He was rather pleased to be able to air his professional knowledge. This job gave him, for the moment, the position of a leader.

It was a very simple affair, and Jacob went about it practically enough. He saw at once when they went downstairs that the main weight of the floor above was carried by plate girders which ran across the room, their bearing being shortened by a steel stanchion in the centre. To these girders were cleated the rolled steel joists which carried the floor boards. There was no concrete, the whole construction was visible and accessible.

Samson despatched a machine hand to find a certain Jenkins, who was to bring with him a ladder, a tape measure, a foot rule, and a pair of calipers, this last tool to determine the thickness of the metal in girders and joists. Jacob meant to do his work properly.

"Well, I can leave you to it," remarked Samson.

"Yes, it's quite an easy job," replied Jacob. "Who are the makers of the machines? — Mealies, did you say they were?"

Samson nodded, and gave him an address in Fleet Street.

"I must find out about the weight, you know," explained Jacob, "and what sort of a bed they have."

Samson nodded again, and went away.

When his measurements were taken, Jacob went to see the makers of the Miehle printing press, and obtained all the information he required. From there he went up to Bloomsbury Square and called upon Lee-Perry, whom he found hard at work in his office, in company with two assistants and a small boy.

"Hal-*lo!*" ejaculated Lee-Perry, with a sort of surprised glee. "I wondered what had become of you. Expected to see you long ago."

"I came up to see if you could let me have a look at a book of steel sections," explained Jacob.

"Gone back to architecture? Good man!" said Lee-Perry.

There was nothing for it but to give a short résumé of the facts, to which Lee-Perry listened with his head on one side.

"Oh! Good man! Let me have a look at the figures," he said.

"It's awfully good of you to waste all this time on me," said Jacob when they had set out a rough plan of the floor, and calculated the strains.

"Not a bit," replied Lee-Perry pleasantly. "Practical experience. Why don't you come up sometimes on Sunday and have a crack?"

"Rather — yes, I should like to," said Jacob. "I'll come next Sunday."

"Good man!" said Lee-Perry.

They decided that the girders were more than equal to the strain that would be put upon them, if the new machines were kept in the centre of the room over the stanchions, and that the stanchions were also equal to their task — if their foundations were good, a question which could not be answered without reference to the plans of the original architect.

Jacob looked into the Strand offices on his way back and found Mr. Samson there.

"The steel-work is all right, if the foundations of the stanchions are," he said, exhibiting his pencil drawing, upon the side of which the calculations had been made. "That you can only discover by referring to the architect of the place."

"Oh, it's good enough," replied Samson carelessly. "I've been looking at your folder for the auto-piano people."

"Is it all right?" asked Jacob.

"I've knocked out some of the letterpress," replied Samson. "They're doing some sketches for the other part in the studio. I've left some letters for you to answer."

"Oh, then I'd better be getting back," said Jacob, his ardour somewhat damped. His morning's work seemed to have been regarded very lightly, and his folder was probably altered out of recognition.

In the front of the packing-room at the factory he saw Blaise talking to an oldish man with a pointed grey beard. They were examining and measuring the stanchions on that floor. Jacob hesitated, uncertain whether he should go up to them and explain that all the work in connection with testing the floor strains had been done. As he paused at the foot of the stairs leading to the first floor, Blaise caught sight of him, grinned ironically, and then deliberately turned his back upon him.

"Common swine!" murmured Jacob, as he went upstairs.

Some six days later Blaise, as he passed through the showroom, paused by the table at which Jacob was working.

"So you were wrong about the floors," he sneered.

Jacob looked up quickly. "I think not," he said.

"We've 'ad the district surveyor in," said Blaise, "and he says the webs of all the stanchions on the ground floor'll 'ave to be stiffened. Lucky we didn't trust to your calculations." He went on into Mr. Samson's office.

When he saw Samson, a couple of hours later, Jacob stopped him and asked if it were true that the surveyor had recommended strengthening the stanchions.

Samson scratched his head. "He's a fussy old chap," he said. "Anyway, it won't do any harm."

"They would have been perfectly safe," said Jacob.

"Oh yes, I dare say. Nothing like being on the safe side. It's a ramshackle sort of a place, this," replied Samson, and made off hurriedly.

Jacob found a few more adjectives to describe Blaise.

4.

Jacob's first fortnight at Price and Mallinson's was a dreadful muddle. He never had any straightforward work to do, and he often came home to his tea and eggs in the evening feeling very depressed and harassed — he was so painfully conscious that he was not earning his salary. That thought worried him, not because he was afraid that the firm would not keep him on, but because it gave him a sense of inefficiency, and that sense, as he well knew, had been his undoing.

Mrs. Latimer had been the only person who had ever chaffed him by suggesting that he had a very good opinion of his own abilities. He had resented the suggestion on one or two occasions, but he wished Mrs. Latimer was in London now; he would have gladly welcomed a repetition of that teasing; it had a splendidly stimulating quality. She had not answered his last letter, but he wrote to her again and told her of his depression and its cause. The employment of stating his case served to throw off some of his depression. He foresaw the nature of her reply, imaginatively phrased a conversation between her and himself, and made out a case for himself by giving weight to her supposititious arguments. He found consolation in the thought that he was not slacking, that he was genuinely trying to earn his salary.

This period of uneasiness came to an end during his third week. The new offices and showroom in the Strand were ready for occupation, and Jacob found himself installed in a comfortable room of his own, the door boldly lettered with the direction "Country Travellers — Mr. Stahl." He was proud of that lettering. It gave him a position in the firm, marked out some distinctive work for him as head of a minor department. He was no longer some casual employé, working at odd jobs in a corner of the factory. That announcement of his position set constantly before him the ideal of some performance which could not be lightly disregarded.

The travellers had been already engaged by Mr. Samson. Jacob never heard the result of his friendly competition with his immediate chief in the framing of attractive advertisements. He learned that both advertisements had produced a large number of replies, but that very few of them were "any good." Four travellers had been ultimately engaged; but two of them had been found by Mr. Samson's private effort — perhaps they had been tempted away from other firms — and one was an employé of Price and Mallinson's who had been in a branch establishment at Sheffield. His name was Dickson.

Jacob learned something of the inwardness of Price and Mallinson's business as reorganized by Mr. Samson — and, incidentally, something of his own capacities and failings — in his interviews with his three travellers. Dickson was, frankly, an amateur as yet.

Mr. Samson had talked to the four recruits, and given them a rose-coloured vision of his "proposition," but when it had come to the practical business of assigning a district to each of them, he had dis-

covered an urgent need for his services elsewhere, and passed on the job to his lieutenant.

Jacob had been glad of the opportunity to get into touch with his men, but he had been very much afraid of exposing his new ignorance of printing. These men were all experts.

They all came to him one Friday morning, two days after he had moved into his new office, and there was a solemn conclave.

The crux of the problem was immediately apparent — the three experts all wanted the important towns. Jacob had procured, at Samson's suggestion, a large scale map of England and Wales, which he had hung conveniently on the left hand side of his desk, and he had roughly divided this in imagination into four large districts of approximately equal size, and had proposed to allocate one district to each traveller. This scheme was upset at once.

A certain Mr. Charles Glass seemed to be the leading spirit. He was a little man with brown eyes and a black moustache; he was dressed in a smart frock coat, with a white slip under his waistcoat and a very large tie that gave him the effect of a pouter pigeon. His top hat and patent leather boots were irreproachable. Jacob guessed him to be about forty years old. Mr. Glass evidently had some reputation as a wit.

"Oh, what-ho!" he said, when Jacob began business by introducing the question of the "South-Eastern Section."

"What did you say?" asked Jacob. He was particularly anxious to strike the right note with these men; he had to retain some dignity as the director of their operations, but he wished to be taken into their confidence with regard to their indi-

vidual work — he wanted "to work with them," in his own phrase.

"I should think the South-Eastern Section would suit Mr. Browning," returned Glass, with a nod at one of his colleagues. "Splendid country for the 'ealth; trips to Brighton and Eastbourne and Tunbridge Wells every day of the week."

Jacob glanced inquiringly at Browning; he was uncertain what Glass meant to imply. There had been a suggestion of banter in his remark.

Browning shook his head. "No go," he said; "not an order worth taking in the 'ole of Kent and Sussex put together."

"Do you mean that that part of the country is not worth working?" asked Jacob.

"Might get an order for five 'undred hotel menoos, now and again," said Glass with great seriousness.

"You see, for a business of this sort," interposed the third traveller — a Mr. Pocklington, whom Jacob judged to be "rather better class" than the other three —"You can't afford to spend so much in fares for small orders. I take it you want the big stuff."

Jacob nodded. "Certainly," he said; "we've got the machinery to take big orders. But what about Southampton, for instance — the shipping companies get out a lot of literature of the kind we want to handle."

"All done from London," replied Pocklington. "Liverpool, now. . . ."

"I lived in Liverpool for three years," put in Glass. "There's 'ardly a firm within a sixty mile circle of Liverpool that I can't get a personal introduction to."

"Oh, you're greedy," said Jacob, with a smile, and this time the laugh was at Mr. Glass's expense.

"Oh no," said Glass, "I'll work Rottingdean, if you prefer it. Some of those litho. specimens ought to retail first-class down there."

"Suppose we get to business," said Jacob.

"That's my mark, exactly," murmured Glass.

"To begin with," said Jacob, "Mr. Dickson takes Sheffield and that district. . . ."

"Including Manchester?" asked Glass.

Jacob hesitated; that was an important point which he had not considered.

"What about Manchester, Mr. Dickson?" he asked. "I suppose you know it pretty well?"

"Oh yes," said Dickson, "I know a good many firms in Manchester."

"And, I suppose," said Glass, with an air of great interest, "in Bradford and Oldham and Halifax and Huddersfield and Shipley and Leeds, and other villages round about?"

"I was born in that part," returned Dickson.

"Perhaps," said Mr. Glass, turning to Jacob, "it might be better, then, to settle Mr. Dickson's district first, and we can easily pool what's left among the three of us. I should like to put in for Cornwall and the Isle of Wight."

"Mr. Dickson takes Yorkshire, in any case," said Jacob; he felt it was time to assert his authority, and turning to Pocklington he said: "You've been working in Birmingham, I believe?"

"Birmingham was my centre," replied Pocklington. "From there I used to work south as far as Bristol, and took in most of the Midlands as far as Derby. . . ."

"And, of course, the counties of Staffordshire, Cheshire, and Lancashire," put in Glass.

"I think we'd better take Mr. Glass's district first," said Mr. Pocklington, with a suggestion of temper.

"We evidently can't settle anything until he's been provided for."

"What is it you want, Mr. Glass?" asked Jacob. "I don't want there to be the least question of favouritism, but you must see that in the cases of Mr. Dickson and Mr. Pocklington it is better for them to work the districts where they have a connection."

"Certainly, certainly," said Mr. Glass. "Perhaps now I had better start with a list of the places where I have a connection?"

Browning stuck his feet out, leaned back in his chair, and stared up at the ceiling. "The British Isles is Glass's speciality," he said.

"Oh, I've 'ad some trade with the Colonies," replied Glass.

"Well, suppose you give us the name of one or two towns for a start," suggested Jacob. "Only do try to realize that they must lie as far as possible within one district."

"Does Mr. Dickson take Manchester?" asked Glass.

"No," said Jacob; "I said Mr. Dickson was to take Yorkshire."

"Well, suppose I start with Manchester," said Glass.

Jacob referred to his map. "And Liverpool?" he suggested.

"And Liverpool," repeated Glass, making notes in an elaborate pocket-book.

"And the rest of Lancashire," said Jacob.

"And the rest of Lancashire."

"I don't see much else north"— Jacob was still intent on the map. "Carlisle, of course. . . ."

"Needn't bother about Carlisle," said Glass. "What about Tyneside? There's some firms in Newcastle I might be able to do business with."

"That ought to go with Yorkshire," mused Jacob, studying the railway communications and reflecting that these men knew the country with an enviable accuracy.

"Oh, you can cut across in no time from Carlisle," said Glass.

Jacob looked at Dickson. "I think you'll have enough to do for a beginning?" he said, with a note of interrogation.

Dickson nodded. "I'll have enough," he agreed.

The scheme was beginning to take shape, but there was still Browning to be considered. He had remained in his attitude of contemplation, his legs stretched out, his hands in his trouser pockets, his eyes fixed upon the ceiling.

"Will you take the Eastern Midlands, Mr. Browning?" asked Jacob. "That gives you Northampton, Leicester, Nottingham, Derby, and one or two other big towns."

"Lot o' ground to cover," remarked Mr. Browning, but he drew his legs in and sat up.

"Gives you Norwich, my boy," put in Glass. "If you can rope in a couple of firms there, it'll keep you going."

"And there isn't any competition in Nottingham and Derby," remarked Browning ironically. "No printin' done there."

Glass grinned. "You've got to pull it away from 'em, my boy," he remarked. "That's what we're out for."

By degrees the allocation of each district was decided, after various compromises had been effected with regard to smaller towns which lay on or near the boundary lines.

Jacob felt that he had not exercised much authority in arriving at the various decisions; the three expert

travellers had, at the last, bargained among themselves. It was so difficult for Jacob. He did not know his England as they did, nor had he the least idea which towns were "good" or "bad" from the travellers' point of view. He did not know where the big firms, whose commodities he saw advertised every day, had their factories and places of business. Whereas these men knew the trade and its possibilities, and they had an extraordinarily accurate knowledge of the lines of communication between town and town. How could he be autocratic when to lay down the law meant an exposure of his ignorance? However, he would learn — he had learnt much this morning, and he found it all very interesting; quite a fascinating game to play.

And presently he had an opportunity to take command and give out some of the wisdom he had been learning from Mr. Samson.

"About backing you up from here," he remarked, when at last all boundaries were settled and notes made. "We are going in for a regular system of circularizing all the big firms, and we want lists of those that are likely to use distinctive printing."

"Circularizing?" questioned Glass.

"Yes; we are going to send out a lot of special specimens of high-class printing, stuff that is too good to be thrown away, got up to appeal to the different trades — good advertising matter."

"Letterpress and litho.?" asked Glass.

"Letterpress," replied Jacob. "I don't want you to press the litho. business; the fact is, we've got about as much now as we can handle — that is, the cheapest sort; posters, of course, to our own designs . . ."

"No charge for the design, I suppose?" remarked Glass casually.

"We submit sketches and prices," said Jacob

quickly. He had no idea whether any charge was made for the design. There were a thousand things he must learn, and learn quickly.

"I thought Price and Mallinson's line was litho.," put in Browning. "What about labels?"

"We don't want them," said Jacob. He knew he was safe there; Samson had insisted upon that point. "I know the firm has done litho. work almost exclusively up to now, but we are going in for letterpress; that is what we want orders for. And, by the way, I want you to realize that we are getting all the machinery of an advertising agency here. It's not only that we'll do the printing: we'll supply ideas, write copy, and all that sort of thing."

"Free, gratis, I suppose?" put in Glass.

Jacob wondered. He had never examined the economics of Samson's scheme. It was evident that the advertising service had to be paid for, in some way, and yet Samson had told him that, at present, there would not be "any special charge for service."

"There won't be any charge for supplying ideas," he said, with a little hesitation.

"That's chucked in with a pound of tea," said Glass. "And, of course, P. and M.'s prices will come out all right, if we have to tender against other firms."

"Our prices are pretty high," said Jacob, remembering another pronouncement of Samson's, and beginning to see a gleam of light; "but we're going to give the advertisers the sort of printing they won't get anywhere else."

"Perhaps," murmured Glass.

Browning had returned to his contemplation of the ceiling.

"And about those specimens," resumed Jacob, returning to his original point; "I should be glad if

you would keep on sending me names of likely firms, so that I may go on pegging away at them from here."

"That's a good scheme," said Mr. Glass.

Jacob was glad that Glass had at last expressed approval. He was the least respectful of the four; he was, without question, "a bounder," but he was also undoubtedly clever. His criticisms, however unpleasantly framed, had been incisive and to the point. Jacob felt that Glass had an intimate and comprehensive knowledge of the printing business.

It was half-past one by the time everything was settled.

"Well, I think that's all, for the present," said Jacob, getting to his feet. "I'm going out to lunch now, but I'm always here if there are any questions you want to ask."

"Report and draw the ready on Saturday mornings, I suppose?" said Glass.

"Oh yes, on Saturday mornings," said Jacob, who had not thought of this point before.

Dickson, Pocklington, and Browning collected their belongings and wished Jacob "Good-morning," but Glass, putting on a pair of brown leather gloves and polishing his immaculate top-hat, lingered behind. When the other three had gone, he remarked:

"Haven't tackled this business before, have you?"

It was best to be honest; one could not deceive Glass. "No," replied Jacob; "but I hope to make a success of it."

Glass nodded in a friendly way. "You'll do all right," he said. "And I dare say there's a few little things I can put you up to, if you're not too proud to take advice."

"I should be very grateful to you," said Jacob.

"I've been in the trade since I was fourteen," remarked Glass, "and I'm still learning."

"Yes, there's a lot to learn in the printing business," agreed Jacob.

Glass paused as if he had something else to add, gave his perfect hat another polish, and then moved to the door without speaking.

"Good-morning," said Jacob.

"Good-morning," replied Glass, "and good luck." He put his hat jauntily on the side of his head, and went out.

"He's a queer chap," thought Jacob, "but he knows his business."

5.

The muddle at Price and Mallinson's did not clear up so quickly as Jacob had anticipated. Those special specimens of printing which were to be such an aid to his travellers were not forthcoming as yet, and he had to make excuses for their non-appearance when Pocklington and Browning came up to report on Saturday morning after their first week's work. Glass had written a long letter asking for designs for a poster for a Steamship Company, and had said that it would be a waste of money for him to come up to town this week. It had been agreed that Dickson should always report by letter.

Pocklington accepted Jacob's excuses politely, and hoped that the specimens would soon be ready; he pointed out that those he had with him were very inadequate representations of "distinctive printing."

Browning, whom Jacob saw separately, was more explicit and less polite.

"What's the use of this stuff to me?" he asked — he had a set of specimens with him —"here — all this auto-pianner stuff."

"What's wrong with it?" asked Jacob.

"Well, it doesn't appeal to brewers, or chocolate manufacturers, or engineers — that's all," grumbled Browning. "They want to see something that they can use themselves. One feller said to me this week, 'Very pretty, but I don't want to buy a pianner just yet, thanks.' He wasn't the only one, either, who thought I was selling pianners."

Browning seemed dispirited.

Dickson had made much the same complaint by letter, and Glass had alluded to it in a postscript. "What about those specimens?" had been his reminder, curt but effective.

Mr. Samson had not been very encouraging. When Jacob had interviewed him on the subject, he had scratched his head, frowned, and fidgeted. "It's a bit difficult just now," he had said. "The two Miehles are full up with some of the town travellers' stuff, and we can't do the same work on that old Wharfedale they've got here. I'll get out some small stuff on the platens as soon as we get the blocks, but the process people haven't anything that'll do for us. They're going to make some special blocks. You'll have to get your fellows to mark time a bit. It'll be all right in a week or two."

Jacob hoped that the specimens would come soon. He wanted his department to be a success. The only result of his first week's work was that a sketch had been put in hand for Glass's steamship poster. Samson had taken that up with warmth. He had sent the work to an artist whose speciality was ships and seapieces, and who had exhibited at the Royal Academy. Jacob wondered how much the artist would charge for that sketch.

That sketch came ten days later, and was generally admired. It was really a striking piece of work when it was remembered that the artist had taken into con-

sideration the fact that it must be reproduced by lithography in not more than six colours. The lettering was done in Price and Mallinson's own studio, and the effect of the whole was, in Jacob's opinion, quite perfect. In this judgment he was ably supported, and one of the partners came up to Jacob's room especially to see the sketch. This was the first time that Jacob had come into personal relations with any of the partners.

Glass was coming up to report that Saturday for the first time, and Jacob was glad that he had such a splendid work of art for him. Glass would see what kind of support he could rely upon from the firm.

"Whe-e-w!" whistled Glass, when he saw the sketch exhibited on the wall of Jacob's office.

"I think that ought to do all right," said Jacob, with enthusiasm.

Glass put his hat down and looked very grave.

"Splendid piece of work, isn't it?" said Jacob.

"Oh, splendid!" replied Glass.

"You ought to get an order with that."

"M'm!" said Glass. He looked at Jacob with a quizzical expression.

"Anything wrong?" asked Jacob.

"Oh, it's fine, splendid, magnificent — a perfect picture; never saw anything better," replied Glass, rubbing his chin. "Only I'm wondering how I'm going to sell a poster of a Cunard ship to the White Star people. It's awkward, that."

"Oh, my Lord!" said Jacob.

"M'm! They've muddled it somehow," said Glass. "Never mind. I'll have a go at the Cunard people. Pity, though. One of the White Star men's a friend of mine."

Jacob found that the blunder had not been of his making in the first instance, though he had forgotten

afterwards for which line the poster had been intended. Nevertheless, he felt responsible to Glass, and apologized on behalf of the firm.

He thought that Glass was very decent about it. "It's not your fault," he said, "I see that. Never mind, I may be able to use it. Do you know what they paid for it?"

That was a question, however, which Jacob could not answer.

6.

Jacob's travellers continued to mark time, inasmuch as they failed to produce remunerative orders. Estimates they asked for — Glass sent in requests for five or six estimates regularly every week — but when reports came it was always found that prices were too high. Many of these estimates were accompanied by sketches, and once when Jacob had a quiet talk with the head estimating clerk, that important personage explained that sketches cost money, and that the expenses of the studio were simply ruinous. The estimator seemed very despondent about the whole proposition. He was a man of figures, Samson was a man of ideas.

Nevertheless more new machinery was going into the works at Pennyquick Place, and at last those much talked of specimens were ready to send out. Jacob had a list of eight hundred firms supplied to him by his travellers, and he and Miss Forrest — she worked for him only, now; Samson had two other young women to do his work — dealt with this bulk of advertising matter to the best of their ability, and in justice to Samson it must be noted that these specimens did produce inquiries, all of which were handed over to the travellers.

If Jacob's work had been confined during those first three months at Price and Mallinson's to the organization of his own department, he might have found his time inadequately occupied, but he had many other occupations. Samson had referred some of the town travellers — there were nine of them — to Jacob for ideas and copy when they were needed, and much of his work in this direction had been quite valuable. He had a straightforward, practical way of dealing with advertising copy which, if it lacked brilliance, seemed to appeal to the firm's customers. This work took up much of his spare time, and he had a hand, also, in the firm's own advertising, of which some of the first-fruits were the orders obtained by his travellers.

Once he scored a notable success.

The firm was getting out a very elaborate booklet to advertise a type-setting machine. The makers of the machine proposed, in the first instance, to supply their own copy for this booklet, but after one or two attempts, they frankly admitted their own failure to produce the kind of description which they required. Samson then suggested to Jacob that he should have "a shot at it," and Jacob spent six hours, notebook in hand, listening to the manufacturers' foreman while he explained the working of the machine in detail.

It was, admittedly, a difficult task to describe the working of that machine in language which should be comprehensible to those who were not expert engineers, and Jacob spent much time and thought in getting his lengthy and complicated notes into shape. When he had at last succeeded to his own satisfaction, he submitted the rough typescript to Mr. Glass, who made many valuable suggestions. The final outcome was a complete success. The manager of the manu-

facturing firm was kind enough to say that it was "just what they wanted."

For many days after that report, Jacob was filled with satisfaction. He did not fail to ascribe some of the credit to the omniscient Glass, but the chief of the glory was his own.

He heard from the head estimator that the firm charged twenty-five pounds for the writing of the copy. Jacob was conscious of satisfaction in the thought that he had certainly earned his salary for that month at least.

CHAPTER XIV

VARIOUS ENCOUNTERS

1.

Mrs. Latimer came back to London at the beginning of April.

She had answered Jacob's two letters after an interval, but had made little comment upon them; she had reverted to her Roman theme. That had been the end of the correspondence. Jacob had been engrossed by his new business; he had shrugged his shoulders at that Italianized and lengthy report of Roman doings, and had decided that it was "hardly worth while to go on writing to her." If he wanted descriptions of Roman life, he could find them in the novels of Marion Crawford. Mrs. Latimer had not the knack of putting her information in an interesting form. Jacob shook his head. He had too much to do just now; he couldn't be bothered with Mrs. Latimer and her descriptions of Italy. He was intrigued by the suspicion that she wrote in this way in order to show him how well she could do it, incidentally to emphasize his own limited knowledge of the world.

When she returned she wrote to him again, and asked him to meet her one Saturday afternon at a tea-shop in Oxford Street. He accepted the invitation willingly enough. He hoped to have some opportunity of demonstrating that Rome was not all the world.

He found her changed in appearance. She had always dressed plainly, almost dowdily. He was at their

appointed meeting-place near the Marble Arch before she arrived, and he did not recognize her until she was quite close to him. She was wearing a rather large hat, trimmed with lace, and a white veil that hung untidily. Her dress was a pale grey with a flounced skirt, and round her shoulders she wore an elaborate lace fichu. Jacob thought she looked an extraordinary figure. He felt self-conscious as they walked together up Oxford Street; he believed that everyone must be staring at his companion. It was a relief when they reached the comparative obscurity of the tea-room.

She was not only gay in her dress. She entertained him with vivacious stories of her life in Rome. He missed the point of some of them, as they were walking — his attention was so distracted; the noise of the street made it difficult to hear — and when she reverted to an earlier story while they were having tea, he had to admit that he had said "yes" and smiled, without knowing in the least what she had been telling him.

"You are very distrait this afternoon," said Mrs. Latimer, with a slight decline from her level of gaiety.

"Am I? I didn't know; I'm sorry," apologized Jacob. "It is so difficult to hear in the street."

"And you are never quite at your ease in a public place," commented Mrs. Latimer.

"I'm at ease," remonstrated Jacob, frowning; "but I do find it rather difficult to talk when there are many people about."

"One soon gets over that when one lives abroad," said Mrs. Latimer.

"I suppose it's very English," returned Jacob; "but then I have always lived in England." He felt that he would have had fewer reserves if he had not been conscious that he and his companion were a

cynosure. He could see that everyone was staring at them.

"You should try to get over it," said Mrs. Latimer. "What does it matter what people think of you?"

"No, no, of course," replied Jacob. "It's very insular." Inwardly he was wishing that she would not be "so confoundedly superior." There was some attraction about the woman that held him, when he was with her, but he wanted to teach, not to be taught. He wanted to correct her faults — as they appeared to him — he had no desire to have his own failings brought to book. He did not think of them as failings, but rather as characteristics, and he preferred to remain as he was.

"In Rome one lives so much in public," began Mrs. Latimer, and gave illustrations.

Jacob wished that he could smoke, and suppressed his yawns with difficulty. He could not guess that what he had characterized as "confounded superiority" was nothing but nervousness; nor that the gaiety of her apparel had been assumed for his benefit. He had no suspicion that it was an effort for her to change the conversation and ask him about his novel.

He shrugged his shoulders when the question was put to him. "It is as it was when you left," he said.

"Have you given it up?"

"Practically."

"Oh, but why?" she asked. She pressed him for a reason while she hoped that that particular novel would never be brought to her again to read. She had a sentimental objection against reading that novel again.

"Well, you see," said Jacob, frowning, "my work takes it out of me too much during the day."

"With the advertising agents?" she asked.

"Oh no. Didn't you read my letters? I told you I had left them and gone to Price and Mallinson's."

"Yes, yes, I remember perfectly, but I thought Price and Mallinson's were advertising agents, too."

"It's a printing business," said Jacob. "I thought I had told you."

"I didn't grasp that part of it," said Mrs. Latimer. "And what do you have to do?"

"That's a long story," returned Jacob with a laugh.

"There's plenty of time," said Mrs. Latimer.

He did not feel inclined for the recital, but she stimulated him with questions, and he soon became interested in his own descriptions. He was aware that he was doing the thing he had condemned in her, but excused himself on the plea that it was his turn now.

"And what sort is this Samson?" she asked presently.

"He's very clever," said Jacob. "He gets splendid ideas, and his theory's all right as far as I can see. . . ."

"But," prompted Mrs. Latimer.

"Well, I don't think he's a good organizer. For instance, he's always cutting across my work; instructing my travellers, and so on. That's all very well — of course, I'm only a novice — but I think he ought to tell me when he has given instructions. It's so awkward when I say one thing and Glass says, 'Oh, but Mr. Samson said so and so.'"

"Of course, Samson ought to tell you," agreed Mrs. Latimer sympathetically.

She was displaying far more interest in Jacob's small affairs than he had shown with regard to her familiarity with Roman society, and that interest pleased him; but he was not satisfied. He was reflecting that she had soon dropped the subject of his

novel. With that thought in his mind, he suddenly closed his account of Price and Mallinson's by saying:

"So, you see, I don't feel much inclined to sit down and write when I get home."

"I should have thought the change would have been rather a relief," said Mrs. Latimer, bracing herself to face the novel again.

"I haven't the energy," replied Jacob. "When I get home I'm used up."

"Oh, poor boy!" said Mrs. Latimer, with a smile.

Jacob did not resent the suggestion of banter. "You don't know how hard I have to work," he said.

"When are you coming to the flat to tell me all about it?" asked Mrs. Latimer.

"It must be on a Saturday or a Sunday," said Jacob. "To-morrow I'm going to tea with a man called Lee-Perry, an architect. I've seen a good deal of him lately."

"Sunday week, then," said Mrs. Latimer.

2.

Jacob had formed the habit of going to Lee-Perry's house on Sunday afternoon. Lee-Perry always seemed glad to see visitors, and he had a wide circle of acquaintances. They all seemed to be acquaintances; he did not appear to have any intimate friends, yet everyone liked him, and he certainly managed to get plenty of work to do. Jacob remembered the many acquaintances whom he and his wife used to welcome in that same house, and wondered why he should have been so unsuccessful in the same profession; but then Lee-Perry had a marked vein of originality in his designs as well as in his character. His work was always appearing in the building papers. He had

worked hard, and he had something approaching genius. Jacob Stahl envied him his talents and his powers of application.

None of the many people Jacob had met in Bloomsbury Square had come into his life. Some of them he had seen half a dozen times, but he felt that their world was not his, and he believed sometimes that they knew it, also. So often, after he had been talking to some new acquaintance there, he or she had assumed from Jacob's knowledge of technicalities that he, too, was an architect by profession, and had put the question to him. His reply that he was "in the printing business" always produced a chill, a "Really, how interesting!" or some other polite formula, followed by a change of grouping in the Bloomsbury drawing-room.

He felt on these occasions that he was a pariah, and sometimes resolved that he would not go to Lee-Perry's again, but he went because he was lonely. It was the only day on which he had an opportunity to converse with his equals. He counted Samson as an equal, but he did not know him out of business.

On the Sunday after Mrs. Latimer's return, however, he met for the first time a man who was not to be classed with those other acquaintances.

Jacob was not introduced to him. He was a man of medium height, with dark hair turning grey at the temples. He had a thoughtful, intellectual face, and Jacob was interested in him from the moment he entered the room. During tea Jacob watched this man with attention. Lee-Perry addressed him as Meredith, called him a "Good man!" for coming, and immediately entered into conversation with him.

Once during tea, Meredith looked at Jacob as though he were going to address him, but someone else intervened with a question and distracted his at-

tention. Jacob was conscious that there was some kind of interest between himself and Meredith; the man attracted him for some unknown reason.

After tea Jacob went to the window, picked a book out of the revolving book-case — Eric's wedding present to himself, by the way — sat down and began to turn over the pages. It was quite usual at these affairs of Lee-Perry's to sit down by oneself and read, if you felt so inclined. The note of informality was always maintained — some of the visitors often settled themselves down to chess or whist.

He found that he had taken up a volume of Browning. He had read little poetry, and knew Browning — as Philip Laurence had hinted most casual readers knew him — by the Piper of Hamelin. Almost instinctively he began to look for this particular poem, but he paused at "The Statue and the Bust," became interested in the opening and went on with it. He read it attentively, puzzling over the meaning of one or two phrases in the last verses, and was so absorbed that he did not see Meredith come over to join him, and was startled when he was addressed.

"What have you got there?" asked Meredith.

"Browning," said Jacob. "'The Statue and the Bust.'"

Meredith sat down. "What do you think of the sentiment?" he asked.

Jacob was inspired to confidence. This man had a curious attraction for him. Jacob felt that he had known him somewhere long ago. It may have been that feeling which led him to throw off his usual shyness with new acquaintances.

"I feel, rather," he said, "as if it had been particularly addressed to me. I have not read it before. I've found a criticism of my own life in it."

"One often finds that in Browning," said Meredith.

"I hardly know him," admitted Jacob.

"Poetry does not appeal to you in a general way, perhaps?" suggested Meredith.

If the question had been put by any other acquaintance, Jacob would have denied the insinuation. He would not have liked any casual inquirer to believe that poetry did not appeal to him; it suggested incapacity, a lack of culture. With Meredith he was perfectly frank.

"I suppose it doesn't," he said. "I have read very little verse."

"Yet you look as if you had read a good deal," said Meredith.

Jacob laughed. "In an inconsecutive, haphazard sort of way, yes," he said.

"That is how I read, too," said Meredith quietly.

"Oh! you've read better than I have," said Jacob.

"How do you know?"

"Intuitively," Jacob smiled again.

"Do you trust your intuitions?" asked Meredith.

This was another opening for pose. Jacob saw with astonishing clearness how he and others would talk of their own intuitions, play up to their hearers, and make the subject an interesting topic of conversation, with never a word of real sincerity in all their confessions and protestations. He had done the thing any number of times, and had congratulated himself on the doing of it. But for some reason he did not want to lie to Meredith.

"I really don't know," he said; "I don't think I have ever considered the subject seriously."

Meredith nodded. He had grave, dark eyes, and he looked at Jacob thoughtfully. "Most people have made up their minds on that subject, or say they have," he remarked. "But then people very rarely speak the truth."

"You see, there is no reason why one should, as a rule," returned Jacob. "One meets people casually, and one makes as good a show as possible about one's own thoughts, and so on. It is hardly possible that the exaggeration can be brought home, and one gets a certain amount of pleasure from posing. I do it, of course — but," he concluded, "I really don't know why, I have a feeling that I should like to be frank with you."

"Do you write?" asked Meredith.

"I have tried," said Jacob.

"And failed to produce anything that gave you satisfaction?"

Jacob nodded.

"That's a good sign," said Meredith.

"Anyway, I have given up writing for the present," said Jacob. "I am working in a printing business, and I find it absorbs all my energy."

"I was in an accountant's office for fifteen years," said Meredith.

"And then?"

"I have been living by my pen for the last two years, but I haven't written anything worth reading yet."

"What do you write?"

"Reviews, and little articles and stories — for the dailies chiefly. And one book — a kind of novel — that sold precisely one hundred and eighty-seven copies on the publishers' reputation. No one has ever heard of it."

"Oh! look here," said Jacob; "we must meet and have a long talk."

"Yes, I know," replied Meredith. "I felt that when I first saw you. But I don't think it will be just yet. I am going down to Cornwall this week until the end of September."

Jacob's disappointment was plainly visible. "I should like to write to you, at least," he said.

Meredith shook his head. "Better not," he said. "I trust certain of my intuitions absolutely. We are going to meet again — I don't know when — and I feel quite sure that it will be better to leave it to fate."

"Aren't we masters of our fates?" asked Jacob.

"In some ways only."

Jacob frowned. He did not understand why he should not write, but he was swayed by a superstitious feeling — it may have been begotten in the mind of his companion — that he *must* abide by Meredith's decision; that it was in some way for his own good.

"You can, at least, tell me what name you write under," he said, after a pause.

"My own — Hubert Meredith. . . ."

The feeling that he was in the hands of fate, that he was being used for some unknown end, stayed with Jacob that evening. In the morning it had vanished. As he sat at breakfast, contemplating his work for the day, he thought that he had been a fool. "Curious chap, Meredith," he reflected, "and very interesting. Psychic, I expect; he looks it. But, of course, it was quite evident that he didn't want to know me. Why should he? I dare say he was a *poseur* of genius, but he certainly had a remarkable power of making me speak the truth. I suppose he thought I was an awful fool to be drawn out so easily."

The only effect of the meeting — if it were an effect — which remained with Jacob Stahl that Monday morning was a sense of the futility of his work with Price and Mallinson. What end did it serve? Who was the better for it? When he reached the office he found that Glass's letter and report, which should have come on Saturday, contained an order for £550. It was the first big order Jacob had had

from his travellers, and with it his feeling of repugnance for his work vanished.

Samson was delighted.

3.

Jacob did not go to Lee-Perry's again that summer; he was being taken in hand by Mrs. Latimer.

Sunday afternoon and evening were nearly always spent at Beaulieu Mansions during May and June; later in the year they rediscovered the Thames. On Saturday afternoons she often took him with her to call upon some of her literary friends — she told him that it was essential he should know as many people as possible — and occasionally they went to the theatre together — upper boxes or dress-circle.

The intimacy progressed. She called him *amico mio*, and sometimes *caro mio;* but as the inflection of her voice expressed no tenderness, he attached no importance to this latter term of endearment. He supposed it had little significance in Italian, and in his ignorance he failed, also, to appreciate that the phrase, *alla tua salute*, which she had taught him to use when he drank the first glass of the claret they sometimes had for supper, though meaningless enough in its usual form, became markedly intimate when the singular pronoun was used. There were other Italian phrases that she taught him which he thought merely foolish, and learnt and repeated mechanically without guessing that he was making love to her in Italian. He often wondered why she was so insistent on his lack of expression; he found the whole affair stupid.

On the other hand, he found a growing pleasure in her society — she drew him out. His writing was not insisted upon at the moment, but she made him talk about himself, and what pleased him better still, about

his ideas. She asked his opinion on the subjects in which he took an interest, and displayed sufficient knowledge herself to encourage him with apt questions. Also, she flattered him by remembering some of his phrases and metaphors, quoting them later and making acknowledgment of her authority.

It may have been that the conventional strain in him — the result of a training he had not yet completely outgrown — prevented his attaching any deeper meaning to her friendship, or it may have been that the thought of any warmer feeling than friendship from Mrs. Latimer was so remote from his own mind that he never thought of crediting her with any emotion which he was incapable of feeling himself.

There were a dozen indications which should have given him cause to think, but he minimized their significance. One such did, indeed, stir him to reflect on the situation for an hour or so, but he found an explanation for it which left the " friendship " theory undisturbed.

Mrs. Latimer had taken him one Saturday afternoon to see some rather dull people who lived in South Kensington — friends whom she had first met abroad during her married life, and had visited periodically ever since. She took Jacob to call because she said these Wilsons would be " useful " people for Jacob to know. Precisely why she didn't explain; it was one of her educative afternoons.

The usual topics were discussed during tea-time — the visit only lasted three-quarters of an hour — but as they were leaving Mrs. Wilson said to Mrs. Latimer:

" I must come and see you one Thursday afternoon. You are at home on Thursdays, aren't you? Only it *is* so unfortunate, so many friends of ours receive on Thursdays."

"Why not pay me a nice, snug, friendly call on some other day?" asked Mrs. Latimer.

"Yes, we will, of course," replied Mrs. Wilson. "How would Sunday afternoon suit you? We often go into the Park in the afternoon, and we could come on so easily from the Marble Arch."

Mrs. Latimer hesitated, and looked slightly confused. "I generally go out of town on Sundays," she said.

"Oh, well, we must take our chance on some other day," said Mrs. Wilson.

"I'm afraid," said Jacob, when he and Mrs. Latimer were outside, "that you were not quite truthful this afternoon."

"Oh! that's only a phrase — the common usage," replied Mrs. Latimer. "And now I'm going to lecture you. You *must* learn to talk to people, whether you like them or not. You sat mum this afternoon. It really is not polite."

"I didn't feel in the mood," replied Jacob; and learned that when one went into society one did not have moods, or, at least, one never displayed them. It was certainly an "educative" afternoon.

But when he pondered Mrs. Latimer's excuse to the Wilsons he could not avoid drawing some inference. Had she such a penchant for his society that she would risk offending the Wilsons sooner than lose one Sunday afternoon alone with him? The reason which presented itself to account for this preference was that it was quite natural she should enjoy the intimate talks she had with him rather than the boring platitudes of the Wilsons. It was a quite insufficient reason, but it seemed to Jacob perfectly natural. It was the kind of reason which would have influenced himself.

CHAPTER XV

OTHER ENEMIES

1.

Jacob had not considered the question of taking a holiday that summer. He had only been working with the firm for six months, and believed that it was not customary for an employé to take a holiday until he had been in service for a year. Next summer he thought it possible that he might have an extra week. He might, perhaps, go abroad — to Rome. Mrs. Latimer had often said that she was longing to show him some of the glories of Italy.

He was, therefore, surprised when Samson asked suddenly one Thursday afternoon at the end of July if it would be convenient for Mr. Stahl to take his holiday at once.

Jacob hesitated. He doubted whether the organization of the country travellers could be run without him. He alone — unless one counted Miss Forrest, who was really a very capable young woman — was fully conversant with all the details of the business. He had the confidence of his travellers. They worked with him, and were quite frank in their statements — with the exception of Browning, perhaps. Browning appeared to trust nobody.

"At once?" repeated Jacob. He was sitting at his own desk; Samson was leaning against the door.

"Well, next week," said Samson. "I'm trying to make the holidays fit in."

"I hadn't thought of taking a holiday this year . . . ," began Jacob.

"Too fond of work?" asked Samson with a grin.

"Well, there are a lot of orders coming in just now . . ."

"They'll drop off after the Bank Holiday," said Samson. "They always come in about this time, so as to be forward with the stuff for the autumn."

"Who'll do my work if I go?" asked Jacob.

"I'll look after it. I'm not going away till the end of next month," replied Samson. "Miss Forrest knows all the details, I suppose?"

"Oh yes!" said Jacob, but he did not feel confident of Mr. Samson's capacity. He knew that some of the travellers did not like his methods. Pocklington, especially, was inclined to complain that Samson upset one's arrangements. Pocklington was very methodical.

"Well, you'd better start Saturday," said Samson.

"Sunday," said Jacob. Samson was on the point of departure, and he moved quickly. "I *must* be here Saturday morning."

"All right," agreed Samson.

"Do I take ten days or a fortnight?" asked Jacob. But Samson had gone. If he had heard the question, he evidently did not think it worth his while to turn back in order to answer it.

Jacob learned from Miss Forrest that everyone, including the typists, took a fortnight.

"You won't go till I come back?" said Jacob. It was an appeal rather than a question.

"Oh no; I'm not going till Mr. Samson goes," said Miss Forrest.

She looked at Jacob with an effect of making a confidence. No overt criticism of Mr. Samson had ever been made by either of them, but there had been

many exchanges of criticism with regard to the travellers, and occasionally Jacob had hesitated on the verge of finding fault, in Miss Forrest's presence, with the intrusions of his immediate principal. Miss Forrest was capable, undoubtedly; and she and Jacob understood one another's business methods.

"Oh, I see!" said Jacob.

"I expect I shall have a *nice* time while you're away, Mr. Stahl," said Miss Forrest.

It was, at once, an explicit criticism of Mr. Samson and an implied compliment to Jacob. There was no question as to the satirical significance of the "niceness" of the time Miss Forrest anticipated. Jacob was grateful to his typist —"secretary" better describes her duties — and she knew it, but he could not fail in loyalty to Samson. After all, Miss Forrest occupied a very subordinate position.

"I expect Mr. Samson will have a tremendous lot to do, with all my work in addition to his own," he said.

"I expect," replied Miss Forrest, with a touch of unusual familiarity.

She turned round as she was leaving the room and looked back at Jacob. He caught her eye, and smiled an apologetic smile. He intended it to convey that he was sorry he could not openly agree with her opinion of Mr. Samson.

But the smile with which she replied — she turned away immediately and left him — seemed to have more significance than a mere acknowledgment of their mutual understanding of Mr. Samson's peculiarities. It was a smile that might have preceded a blush. And when Jacob was alone, he pursed his mouth and stared at the opposite wall.

That briefest of glances conveyed more to him than all the elaborations of Mrs. Latimer.

"Oh, my Lord! no, it wouldn't do at all," he murmured, as he returned to his work.

The next morning he was very reserved, cold, and distant when Miss Forrest came in to take down the morning's letters. His coolness was quite unnecessary. Miss Forrest was business-like as usual, and nothing in her expression gave any hint that for the fraction of a second some kind of personal confidence had passed between them.

She wrote with her pad on her knee that morning, as she did sometimes when the desk was covered with papers, and Jacob could not fail to observe once again that Miss Forrest had particularly well-shaped feet and ankles.

2.

Jacob intended to leave everything "straight" at the office before he left for his holiday, but the task proved too much for him. Glass, Pocklington, and Browning all turned up at the office on Saturday morning, all with orders, and each of them with complaints as to the methods of the firm.

By one o'clock Jacob was feeling harried. It was such a temptation on these occasions to excuse himself by admitting that the blame might be quite rightly imputed to the conduct of the works department in Pennyquick Court. He inwardly resented the task of covering mistakes due to Samson's lack of organization and Blaise's incompetence, by some explanation which exhibited him as the representative of the firm in opposition to its employés as represented by the country travellers. He had far more sympathy with his travellers than with any other servants of Price and Mallinson's; if he had obeyed his natural instinct on that Saturday morning, he would have taken Glass,

Pocklington, and Browning into his confidence, and established sympathetic relations with them; he would have found real pleasure in letting himself go with a bitter criticism of the management of the works.

Glass made it more difficult. He seemed to know precisely the cause of every delay and misreading of instructions. Before his two colleagues, he maintained a demeanour that was comparatively discreet, indulging his critical gifts only by an occasional innuendo, but he was perfectly frank in his apportionment of blame when he had Jacob alone.

It was a harassing morning, and ended in something approaching an outbreak.

Pocklington had gone, but Glass and Browning were still settling matters of detail.

"And about that little order for booklets for Fennimore's," said Browning; "is it going through?"

"It's gone to Blazes, you can bet your life," interpolated Glass.

Jacob looked up sharply.

"Er — beg his pardon — *Mr.* Blaise's," said Glass.

"It's been in three weeks, and I 'aven't 'ad a pull yet," remarked Browning. His face had grown glum at Glass's facetiousness. "It's a little job, but I've been 'oping to get a bigger order from Fennimore's on the strength of it."

"I'll find out," said Jacob. "Wait a moment." He turned to the private house telephone at his elbow which was connected with the works, and after a delay of some minutes got into communication with the department he required. No one, however, seemed to know anything of the "order for a thousand booklets for Fennimore's," and everyone appeared far too busy to have any time to make inquiries. Then communication was cut off, and Jacob had to send Miss Forrest down to the counting-house in order to re-

quest the girl at the exchange to put him on to the works again, and keep him on until she was told to cut him off. This was not to be accomplished at once, however, as one of the partners was using the same line. Miss Forrest said that the exchange girl would ring Mr. Stahl up when the line was free.

Jacob put the inquiry on one side for the moment, and turned his attention to other matters brought forward by Mr. Browning.

Twenty minutes went by without any exhibition of activity by the telephone, and then Jacob fiercely rang up the exchange again.

"Can't you get the works for me?" he demanded, when his summons had been attended to.

"Oh! yes; sorry; I forgot," was the answer he received. He was glad Mr. Glass could not hear.

When he was through to the works, Jacob went straight to headquarters. "I must speak to Mr. Blaise — at once," he said. "Mr. Stahl — oh yes, Stahl, Stahl — country travellers' department in the Strand." He clicked his tongue, frowned, and sighed, as he sat with the instrument (receiver and mouthpiece all in one) to his ear.

After an interval he was told that "Mr. Blaise was busy; was it important?"

"Yes, very important," replied Jacob angrily.

At last Mr. Blaise condescended to come to the telephone.

Jacob explained patiently, even politely.

"Oh — ah, I know," drawled Blaise; "we 'aven't touched it yet. Them fiddlin' little jobs of yours are 'ardly worth worryin' about."

Jacob choked. "But you see, Mr. Blaise," he explained, making a big effort, "Fennimore's is a big firm, and Mr. Browning is very anxious to get in with them."

"All right. We'll get on to it next week some time," drawled Blaise, and rang off.

"Mr. Blaise got it in 'and all right, I suppose?" said Glass.

"Oh, damn Mr. Blaise!" exploded Jacob.

"Same 'ere — with trimmings," agreed Glass fervently.

"I'm afraid the job's been put back," Jacob explained to Browning. "I'm going for my holidays to-day, but I will leave a special note for Mr. Samson explaining how important it is that you should get it at once."

"Got an appointment with Fennimore's for We'n's-day," growled Browning.

"You shall have a proof on Wednesday morning, first post," said Jacob.

When he had at last settled the immediate affairs of Browning it was nearly two o'clock. Glass still stayed behind.

"Mr. Samson going to run the whole show while you're away?" he asked.

Jacob nodded.

"God save Ireland!" remarked Glass.

"Well, I dare say you'll get more attention at the works," said Jacob.

"I think I'll take a fortnight off till you're back, and chance it," said Glass.

Jacob smiled. He appreciated the compliment, but he had to maintain his attitude of loyalty to the firm. "Oh no, I shouldn't do that," he said. "We're shaking down all right now."

"Been too much shaking, and too little down to suit me," replied Glass. "I've been more shook up than down, if you ask me."

"It'll be all right," said Jacob. He was anxious to get his work finished now.

"Between you and I," said Glass, who sometimes overreached himself in the matter of grammar, "I shan't be sorry when the time comes."

Jacob had the same feeling, and the sense of his inability to straighten the muddle, the hopelessness of the effort to combat the inefficiency of Blaise, made him careless in the final settlement of the minutiæ of his business, before he resigned it for a fortnight to the care of Samson.

As it was, he stayed at the office till four o'clock; but at last, feeling that he could struggle no longer with the worry and bother of it all, he left the remainder to Miss Forrest.

"You know the details pretty well," he said. "I don't know that I need keep you any longer now."

"Oh no," she said; "I don't think there can be any mistake now." She put her hands to her temples and pushed back her fringe.

"Headache?" asked Jacob sympathetically. "I'm sorry I've had to keep you so long."

"Oh, it's nothin'," replied Miss Forrest a little wearily. "The heat's rather tryin'." She sat quite still, looking out of the window. It was not an inspiriting outlook. The lower sash was glazed with "obscured" glass; through the upper could be seen other windows of similar design, reaching upwards, their background a monotony of white glazed bricks, scored by lines of iron rainwater- and lead soil-pipes, and stained with dust and dirt wherever the bricks were protected from the direct action of the rain; for a foot below the sill of every window there was a grey area of dirt.

Instinctively Jacob followed the direction of her gaze into the "well" of this open area.

"Pretty dreary outlook," he remarked. It was very familiar to him. He had never acquired that

detachment from his surroundings and absorption in his business which would have made him unconscious of such details of existence as the fact that the outlook was depressing.

"And nothing else to look forward to," said Miss Forrest.

Jacob became aware that his typist was speaking in her character of a human being; further, that this particular problem of a future for such humanity as she represented was an interesting and difficult one. The only solution rose instantly to his mind. He had it on the tip of his tongue: "*You* are sure to get married." He did not give utterance to it, because he remembered that one glance of understanding she had given him only two days before.

For six months he had been in this girl's company for some hours of every working day, and frequently he had appraised her good looks, had thought of her at odd moments as a woman and not as a typist. Yet such appraisement had always been detached; he had admired the attraction of her femininity as he might have admired the photograph of any pretty woman. He had never, until two days before, thought of her in any relation to himself. And that thought he had put away from him until this moment.

Now he deliberately suppressed his remark as to the probability of her marriage. He was afraid of going too far. She had let her hands fall into her lap; she was still staring out at that dreary prospect of white glazed brick and gloomy window. She looked frail, pretty, a little pathetic. She had tumbled her fringe, and the disarrangement gave her a more girlish look. Jacob felt a wave of protective sympathy surge over him. He realized that it would be a delicious occupation to make this pale, pretty thing happy, to raise her in her own esteem, make the slave

a queen, and give her a full taste of her own power — teach her that, however humble her occupation had been, she was a potential ruler of men — or at least of one man — by virtue of her womanhood. . . .

There was no coarseness in his thought. His life had not been a moral one according to conventional standards, but he had a quite exceptionally clean mind for a young man. It was this fineness of thought which saved him in the present instance. He remembered that he could not offer marriage, which in his quixotic imaginings had been the basis of his impossibly romantic conception.

" Impossibly romantic " it was, because the girl was not the right material, as he might have guessed had he condescended to common sense observation. That pose of hers was artificial, on the face of it — she had, indeed, once been photographed in that position, a most successful and charming representation. That ruffling of her fringe was not accidental, but another artifice. Was not her artifice evident at all points? Had she ever given him the least indication that she was in love with him? She was patiently endeavouring to lure and trap him. She was tired of working; she wanted a home of her own, and this man was attractive —" a nice, gentlemanly young fellow," in her own phrase, " and quite good-looking." His salary of £260 a year seemed ample to her.

There had been a long silence. Jacob became aware that the situation was embarrassing. He looked down at the notes which lay before him.

" And you won't, before all things, forget," he said, " to impress upon Mr. Samson that I have promised a pull of Fennimore's booklet by first post on Wednesday? "

Miss Forrest started slightly, and dropped her eyes.

"I won't forget, Mr. Stahl," she said demurely.

"Thanks! I trust everything to you," said Jacob, getting to his feet. He wanted to be particularly kind to this pathetic young woman. "I'm awfully sorry to have kept you so late . . ." He hesitated, and then stretched out his hand. "Good-bye for a fortnight," he said.

She took his hand, held it tightly for a moment, and looked into his eyes. But she could read nothing there save the kindness of an employer who had a regard for the feelings of his subordinates. She dropped his hand and went out with a half-suppressed sigh. It was too soon, yet.

She returned to her consideration of laying traps with the supreme, miraculous patience of the woman.

In her mind she had a picture of a shop-window that displayed blouses and other likely baits.

3.

When he left the office, Jacob carried with him the impression of being jostled. It was only by concentrating his attention on the thought that for fifteen days he was a free man that he could lessen the oppression of business worry. His mind had a tendency to repeat the operations of the past few hours. As he sat over his combined lunch and tea in a Strand tea-shop, he found himself watching the progression of the Fennimore booklet. He saw Miss Forrest impressing upon Samson that the proof had been promised by Wednesday morning; he saw Samson giving definite instructions to Blaise; and then he saw Blaise putting the work on one side, failing to appreciate the importance of that promise. At that stage he would frown and try to reconstruct his picture, jump an interval, and witness an imaginary

Fennimore receiving Browning with enthusiasm, and giving him a big order; but his obstinate mind always returned to the picture of an incompetent, jealous, deliberately mischievous Blaise, thrusting the copy of the booklet into some pigeonhole, with a grim smile of satisfaction at having shelved one of Stahl's "fiddling little jobs."

"I'm tired," thought Jacob. "What does it matter to me now? I'll forget all about the office for fifteen days. I will absolutely put all thought of it out of my mind."

The remembrance of Miss Forrest troubled him not at all. He was inclined to congratulate himself on his conduct of that affair. He had acted with tact, and he had been creditably self-sacrificing. It would have been quite pleasant to kiss Miss Forrest, and he had resisted the temptation. He did not doubt that she would have allowed him to kiss her, but not for one moment did he entertain the idea that she was seriously in love with him. He never could conceive the idea that any woman could be seriously in love with him. In this instance he was undoubtedly right.

It was not until he had finished tea and was finding some solace in a cigarette that he turned his attention to the urgent problem which was confronting him. He had not decided what he should do with his fifteen days of freedom. Obviously, it would be absurd to stay in London. He pictured vaguely the delights of the seaside, but he had a strong disinclination to consider all the arrangements that would be necessary before the picture could be realized. His mind was certainly tired. It appeared to him an insuperable difficulty at the moment that his flannels were not clean. He had upset some tea over them the last time he had gone up the river, and had carelessly failed to send them to the cleaners. And if that were

not enough, he knew so little of seaside places that he did not know how to get lodgings. Above all, he did not feel in the mood to worry over these things. Holidays were designed for rest and enjoyment, not for worries. He had risen above the English middle-class conception of a holiday. In any case, he could not go until Monday. He had his usual appointment with Mrs. Latimer for the next day.

Nevertheless, the holiday mood was upon him. He did not want to go quietly home to his lodgings. He decided that he would go to a music-hall. There was that new place in Cambridge Circus, which had been an English opera-house. He would go there. . . .

Yet, despite all distractions and visions, the thought of Blaise returned to him when he was at last in bed; returned and kept him awake; Blaise, with a sneer, always neglecting to have the copy for Fennimore's booklet set up and pulled. It gave him a feeling of physical discomfort. He wanted to be actively engaged in holding the works-manager's nose to the grindstone, but there seemed to be no alternative to this thought of a perpetually recurring, maliciously thwarting Blaise.

CHAPTER XVI

ESCALADE

1.

When Mrs. Latimer tentatively, almost shyly, made the suggestion that Jacob should spend his holiday on the river, and that she would accompany him, he shrank instinctively from the proposition. She began with, "Why shouldn't you . . . ?" but his opposition, however feebly hinted, warmed her to an elaboration of her plans. When it came to, "Why won't you . . . ?" he was already convinced. Nevertheless, that same instinct which had induced his preliminary distaste for the scheme rose up to insist that the proprieties should be rigidly safeguarded. Mrs. Latimer's statement that she was old enough to be his — well, aunt — was countered with the question whether she would assume that relationship as a cloak. Plainly she shrank from that. "A sister?" was the next question. But that also did not satisfy her. She discussed it as though it were subject for humour. Jacob had intended it in all seriousness.

Mrs. Latimer saw no reason why they should not go to some quiet little hotel at, say, Shepperton or Halliford. She mentioned these places because it was from Halliford that they had started on the two occasions on which they had spent an afternoon on the Thames — one afternoon on the river, the other in the boathouse watching the rain. Jacob frowned over this proposition. He was hardly proud of Mrs. Latimer as a river companion. Her appearance

made him self-conscious. He had struggled, was still struggling, against this feeling. In his own mind he designated the feeling as "rotten." He was ashamed of it. But he did not picture himself staying at one of those small hotels at, say, Halliford, where he was known slightly, in company with Mrs. Latimer. If she had been willing to advertise a hypothetical auntship, and dress the part, he would not have cared. He found it so difficult to disregard the observation of the crowd, even though it consisted only of boatmen, hotel servants, and bar-loungers. "What people would think"— or, rather, what he argued they would think — was an important factor to him, so long as his own desires did not set toward an eclectic pariahism. In this case he would have preferred a companion whose company would have made him subject for envy. He would not, for instance, have objected to any innuendo from boatmen or bar-loungers if his companion had been Miss Forrest. But who can appear magnificently unconscious of a snigger? He knew that that boatman at Halliford —"Badger," they called him — would snigger.

Unhappily, the whole argument was unstateable, and he would far sooner have faced the most open snigger from Badger than have wounded Mrs. Latimer's vanity.

The third option was the use of diplomacy. Jacob was ingeniously tactful. He discovered a longing to show Mrs. Latimer a far more beautiful strip of the river than that between Sunbury and Penton Hook. He dilated on the peace, the immunity from trippers, of the higher river. Most convincing was his lapse into the poetical attitude. His pronunciation of such names as Sutton-Courtney or Long Wittenham endowed them with an air of romance. . . .

Mrs. Latimer conceded the point, even with enthusiasm. It was settled that Jacob should go and prospect, and he stipulated for *carte blanche*. Whatever he chose she must approve. He would do his best. He would go early the next day and wire as soon as he had found a possible hotel, or respectable rooms.

And as they planned Jacob's mind was crossed by a perfidious suggestion. He might most deliberately fail to discover suitable lodging; he might spend his holiday sending daily telegrams as to the unworthiness of Thames-side accommodation. He fought that suggestion, but even as Mrs. Latimer pleaded, in saying good-night, that he would try first at the place with the pretty name —"Sutton-Courtney, wasn't it?"— he was conscious of a feeling of regret that he was not taking Miss Forrest instead.

2.

Fate was playing for Mrs. Latimer.

Jacob discovered so near an approach to the ideal at the second place he tried in Sutton-Courtney, that no excuse for procrastination remained. The place and its owner looked clean; the house was pretty, and stood detached in its own garden; the terms were not excessive, and he had never expected to find rooms very cheap on the Thames during August. But most conclusive was the fact that Mrs. Peake, the prospective landlady, had only one bedroom to let. "There's only two bedrooms in the 'ouse," she explained, "and me and me 'usban' hoccupies the hother; but if the gentleman wouldn't mind sleeping hout, there was Mrs. Joyce, only a few steps up the road, as 'ad a room, and was always willin' to oblige,

though not able to do meals, owing to her 'aving a bad 'ip."

The gentleman was overjoyed at this prospect of perfect respectability — the freedom from innuendo he would enjoy by sleeping out. He had hesitated over his description of his "party"— Mrs. Peake had used the term; his own phrase had been "rooms for two people," with a hasty addition of "two bedrooms and a sitting-room." He described his "party" as an "oldish lady" (Heaven keep the knowledge from Mrs. Latimer!) who was, however, quite active and capable of attending to her own wants. He rather let himself go under this head, speaking of his proposed companion with great detachment, as if he and Mrs. Peake were old friends, and Mrs. Latimer some person whom he had met casually. He thought he had completely cleared Mrs. Peake's mind of any suspicion. He took the rooms for a fortnight from that moment, and wired to Mrs. Latimer. He had brought his own luggage with him, and left it at Culham Station. The tea-stained flannels had come with him. They were quite good enough for so remote and unfashionable a part of the river as this.

3.

A return wire conveyed the news to Jacob that Mrs. Latimer would arrive at 6:47 the next afternoon. He wondered why she should not have come in the morning. On the whole he was rather relieved; he would have one day to himself.

He was at first disappointed to find that he could not hire a Canadian canoe at the boathouse, but on reflection he decided that it was just as well. The rather broad-bottomed skiff — the only single-sculler

obtainable — was better suited for lying about and reading than a canoe. He had brought a copy of "The Golden Bough" with him, and meant to study it carefully while he had the leisure.

He engaged the skiff for a fortnight, and made immediate use of it. It was a disappointment to him to find that he would have to pass through the lock in order to reach the backwater that was so essentially a place to lie about in.

He did not read much of "The Golden Bough" that afternoon. There were so many interesting things to distract the attention — water-rats, dabchicks, and moorhens, to say nothing of dragonflies and the fish one could see in the water by looking under the shadow of the boat. There was no fear of upsetting that broad-bottomed skiff, but it was not, after all, a very comfortable boat in which to read.

Still another source of distraction was the thought of Mrs. Latimer's arrival. He did not quite know why she should come on this holiday. She was not a figure that seemed in place in any picture of the small discomforts of river-side lodgings and daily adventures in a skiff. Jacob had "roughed it" on the Thames, and he never associated the river with the conveniences and appliances of civilization. He wondered whether Mrs. Latimer would fuss. It appeared extremely likely that she would. . . .

She gave no sign of having come prepared to find fault when she got out of the train. On the contrary, she found everything "exquisite."

"It is rather a jolly evening," was Jacob's reply to her more highly-flown comment. He wanted to keep the conversation at a sensible level — especially before the station-master and porter.

She would not be driven to the village, so the lug-

gage was sent on, and she and Jacob walked. She walked on air; Jacob was very sensible of the hard road. She was in a highfalutin mood, which, in his opinion, was a wrong note on first arrival. He wanted to start sensibly, at any rate. He was distinctly educative during their walk. He persistently dragged the conversation down to the level of reality.

When Mrs. Latimer reached the river, and was enthusiastic over its beauty, he used such adjectives as "nice" and "pretty" in his replies. There was a flaw of wind on the water, and Mrs. Latimer, looking towards the sunset, said the ripples were like kisses.

"I didn't know kisses had any particular shape," returned Jacob. "Can you see a kiss — the thing itself, I mean?"

"Oh, you've no imagination!" said Mrs Latimer, and refused to be depressed.

The cottage delighted her, and when she learnt that there would be no difficulty about the filling of the flannel-covered india-rubber hot-water bottle she had brought with her, she expressed entire approval of all the arrangements, and appeared not at all dispirited at the promise of eggs and bacon for supper.

"It's a little bit primitive in some ways, of course," apologized Jacob, "but I think it will be nicer than an hotel."

"Charming — altogether delightful and charming, *caro mio*," said Mrs. Latimer.

After supper they took a stroll up the village, and discovered gipsies on the green. Mrs. Latimer found this "deliciously quaint and romantic."

Jacob had given up his attempt to subdue her ecstasy, and assented.

It was hardly dark yet. He could distinguish her features quite plainly. He saw a woman of forty,

tall and thin, who walked with rather mincing steps; who peered before her with short-sighted eyes; who, despite her marriage, had the stamp of spinsterhood on the lines of her face. He saw only a middle-aged woman making herself rather ridiculous by her enthusiasm over the quiet beauty of a small village seen in the half-lights. If he could have seen her soul, he would have known that she was a romantic school-girl taking her first peep at life's great adventure.

4.

Even the proverbial blindness of the unwilling has a limit of endurance. Jacob's "I will not" was being countered by "You shall." It is true that on the Sunday that this river trip had been suggested he had been stricken with fear. But he did not put his thought into words; he countered it with the reply that the idea was altogether too ridiculous — and he stayed there. He never once made application of his thought, and considered what could come of the ridiculous, if the ridiculous happened to be true. He simply denied the hypothesis without investigating its significance.

In this fool's paradise he took perpetual shelter, but he stood often at the gate and looked out with dim eyes, that suffered from the chronic myopia of those who live in that chimerical garden. . . .

They spent a great part of every fine day on the river, and Jacob's "Golden Bough" became to him what a certain copy of Heineccius was to David Balfour — a means of retreat — though the two cases will not bear comparison.

On many occasions Frazer was read aloud, but the discussions which followed had a tendency to wander

from the subject of comparative religion to topics of less general, far more intense interests.

Mrs. Latimer's blindness was of precisely the same kind as Jacob's, but she groped about her paradise with ecstatic hands, while he sat and pretended to see things that were not there according to the more general rule. Mrs. Latimer had no real intention of precipitating any climax — she was wise enough for that; but, woman-like, she could not resist the temptation to endanger the happiness she was now enjoying, in order to risk the gain of something still more wonderful, however remote she judged that wonder to be. Perhaps she had too great confidence in Jacob's blindness; perhaps she was sometimes carried away by her own emotions; perhaps even the cloister had failed to eliminate some inborn tendency to gamble.

There were days when each of them was quite content with things as they were. Each sat, as it were, in the seclusion of his own little fool's paradise, and they talked over the wall. Neither had ever dared to look into the other's garden. That was unnecessary, was their excuse on these calm days; neither, as yet, dared the thought that one glance over that wall meant the instant dissolution of his or her own garden. When they were separate they turned to the gate that looked out on reality, but they could not see the real because of that chronic myopia; the cure, final and instant, for that myopia was one glance over the wall.

It was only the woman who was curious; she would stand for hours by that wall. She knew of a ladder, light and accessible, that would enable her to climb it, and sometimes her curiosity was so great that she put the ladder in position and took a hesitating step or two up the lower rungs.

On their first Sunday at Sutton-Courtney she found that ladder a very tempting plaything. They were moored in the backwater, Mrs. Latimer sat in the stern playing with the tiller ropes, Jacob faced her, sitting in the bottom of the boat, his back against the seat. The conversation had drifted — or been led — to the well-worn subject of platonic friendships between a man and a woman.

Mrs. Latimer put a foot on the ladder. "Tell me your real opinion, *caro mio*," she said. "Do you think that kind of friendship is ever possible between a man and a woman?"

Jacob relit his pipe, and gave the subject his best consideration. "I can't see why not," he delivered himself sagely. "I suppose it depends largely on circumstances and temperament. But I do not see why, theoretically, the thing should not be possible."

"Between a man and a woman who have no other attachments, and are both young — at heart?" asked Mrs. Latimer.

"Yes! Even then," replied Jacob. "Why should . . . other considerations necessarily enter? I feel absolutely certain that I am capable of a friendship like that."

Mrs. Latimer went up another rung. "But if you found out that your friend was not of your mind — that your friend could not be content with the platonic?"

"That would make it impossible, I suppose," said Jacob. "That would mean that the friendship would have to stop."

"Or give place to something else?"

Jacob shied. "We are introducing an unnecessary hypothesis," he said. "What we are considering is the abstract possibility of such a friendship;

we must not assume immediately that one of the two people has . . . given away."

"How scientific you are!" interpolated Mrs. Latimer.

"I like the scientific method," replied Jacob.

"And rather pompous," she continued, "and didactic."

"Well, you asked me for my opinion," remonstrated Jacob.

"Go on, *caro mio*, let us have your exposition," she said, and dabbled one hand in the water.

"It isn't an exposition," said Jacob; "I don't want to be didactic in the least. I only say that I see no reason why *ex hypothesi* a platonic friendship is not possible between a man and a woman."

"Because the woman is a woman, blind bat," laughed Mrs. Latimer. "How do you ever hope to become a novelist?"

"I am still unenlightened," remarked Jacob.

"That is what I complain of," she returned.

"Do you mean that *no* woman is capable of a platonic friendship?"

"For a time, perhaps — not for always."

"I shouldn't have thought that was true," persisted Jacob. "It is a tremendous generalization. In any case, it seems to me that it is practically always the man who breaks the rules, and asks for more than the friendship allows."

"Oh dear no!" said Mrs. Latimer. "Women tire of restraint much sooner than men."

"But they are brought up to disguise their feelings; they are trained to self-restraint from the nursery, in a way that boys are never trained," argued Jacob.

"They are so much weaker," said Mrs. Latimer. She had come down and put the ladder back in its place. She had decided that it was not quite the

right time for looking into other people's gardens. "Never mind," she went on; "let me hear some more about the Dying God."

Jacob was quite willing to read again. He had not been badly scared, but he was a little nervous. . . .

Two days later she was climbing again.

They had been up to Abingdon to buy tobacco for Jacob; and on the way down she made another essay. She ought to have given more attention to the steering. She was extraordinarily helpless in such things — she had been taught to make herself useful in the house, not in the field. Her early attitude towards such pastimes as boating was that the correct thing was to be frightened and very dependent on the wonderful skill of males, such as her father, in the management of these dangerous contrivances. She had acquired more common sense since those days, but no skill in handling the tiller-lines. Jacob often anathematized her inwardly for her stupidity (it sometimes appeared almost as imbecility to him) in such matters. She had once complained that steering made her arms ache — an early-Victorianism which he mentally classified as "absurd affectation."

Jacob was sculling very deliberately and quietly; the river was peaceful, and conversation could be carried on in comfort. He had encouraged his companion to talk of Rome; it was a safe topic, and he was conscious of an increasing anxiety with regard to a choice of topics.

The name of Cartwright caught Jacob's attention; he had been listening perfunctorily, but this seemed a name he ought to know. In any case, it was about time he showed some interest.

"Cartwright?" he said. "Awfully stupid of me; I can't place Cartwright for the moment."

"I don't know that I have mentioned him before,"

said Mrs. Latimer. "He was *locum* for the English chaplain at Rome for part of last winter."

"Oh yes," said Jacob. "Young man?" He was not interested, but it was just as well to keep the conversation going.

"A man of about sixty, I should say — a widower with two beautiful children. I saw a good deal of them. I should like you to meet him. He would interest you."

"Oh! Why?" asked Jacob, and let his attention wander again. When he picked up the thread once more, he found that Mrs. Latimer was engaged in elaborating some sort of allegory. She had a trick of using this form on occasion. He listened attentively. He was really ashamed of his lapse of attention this time. As far as he could understand. she was telling him that some woman had refused some man's offer of marriage.

"It wasn't that she didn't admire him," Mrs. Latimer continued, "and she told him that; and it wasn't because she would not have loved to be a mother to his beautiful children. . . ."

Jacob guessed that the man was Cartwright.

". . . but there was another kingdom in the mountains that she had set her heart upon. . . ."

In puzzling over this confusion, Jacob lost the drift again. It was so difficult to distinguish fable from fact.

"Do you blame the Princess, *caro mio?*" asked Mrs. Latimer at last, most confusingly.

"Why, of course not," returned Jacob with warmth. He had not the remotest idea that Mrs. Latimer had told him that she had refused the Rev. George Cartwright's offer of marriage because she had set her heart on "another kingdom in the mountains;" he merely wished to make her believe that

she had had his best attention. "Of course not. Did she — er — win her kingdom in the mountains?"

"*Chi lo sa?*" replied Mrs. Latimer.

Jacob had learnt that phrase. "Won't anyone ever know?" he said. "I say, look out; there's another boat coming."

"Oh! which string do I pull?" asked Mrs. Latimer.

"The right," said Jacob.

She pulled it too hard, and the skiff was into the rushes before Jacob had time to ship his scull; the scull jammed and the rowlock snapped.

"I'm *so* sorry," said Mrs. Latimer.

"Doesn't matter," replied Jacob. "He won't charge more than a bob for that. There's enough left to get home with, but you'll have to help me by careful steering." He wished she had not made him look like a fool before that other boat-load of people.

Mrs. Latimer's little attempt to arouse his jealousy had failed utterly. She thought that the wall was higher than she had judged it to be. She did not know that he had not understood her allegory.

5.

No climax was reached until they were actually in the train going home.

They went on Sunday afternoon. Jacob was to go to Beaulieu Mansions for supper. He was not sorry to be going back to London, for some reasons; he wanted his freedom again. All through this holiday he had been conscious of a feeling of restraint. He hated that feeling.

Mrs. Latimer had embarrassed him by her insistence that the lion's share of payment was to be hers. They had argued some items of the lodging account, but the hire of the skiff she monopolized. "Don't

spoil the holiday for me," she had said; "I should like to buy the dear thing." Jacob thought that if he bought a boat, it should have better qualities than that ramshackle affair. He could not sentimentalize over it.

She said good-bye to everything before they went to the station. She found "kisses" on the water again, and said good-bye to them.

She insisted on paying Jacob's fare to Paddington. He had taken a single, as he thought he might be going back from some other station. She took a first-class ticket, and had her own excessed.

They found an empty compartment when the train ran into Culham Station, but the third-class carriages were crowded. It was a long-distance train, and people were coming back from their holidays.

"I expect we shall have a crowd in at Didcot; it's a junction, you know," said Jacob, as the train started.

"When is Didcot?" asked Mrs. Latimer.

"Next station, and then Reading," replied Jacob. He was merely making conversation; he had not the least idea that he was precipitating a climax.

She hesitated even now. The train was actually slowing up before she risked everything. She leaned forward suddenly and took his hand. "Oh, can't you understand?" she said.

He did understand utterly and horribly. He knew immediately that he had understood for some time. But now she knew that he understood, and that altered everything.

He blushed, and stammered. And then the train drew up at the Didcot platform, and three passengers plunged into their compartment.

Mrs. Latimer shrank into her corner and looked out of the window. Jacob imitated her example. He

gathered with relief that the three intruders were going to London.

"I'll look after the luggage," he said to his companion when they reached Paddington; he had hardly looked at her again on the journey. Only, as they had crossed Maidenhead Bridge, she had caught his attention for a moment, and had waved a silent good-bye to the Thames, with a little wan smile.

He had her luggage put upon a hansom, found her, and helped her in. For one instant she hesitated, and then she pulled the leaves of the apron together, and said: "Tell him the address."

Jacob could hardly see her in the gloom of the cab. He told the driver the address. She waved one feeble hand in farewell to him before the horse started. He stood, hat in hand, while the cab rattled out of the station.

He thought that London reeked intolerably; the smell of the station was unbearable.

He found another cab and drove to Torrington Square. It was only six o'clock when he arrived.

He felt as if he had committed some act which made him contemptible in the eyes of men.

6.

That night any thought of compromise was impossible to him. In the morning he received a letter from her — an inordinately long letter. He could not face it before he went to the office. He was bracing himself to the task of taking up his work again, and he was surprised to find that the thought of that work had become so distasteful.

Only fifteen days ago he had jibbed at the suggestion of taking a holiday. He had been engrossed in the detail of his business, anxious lest any thread

should be dropped while he was away. His work had been a part of his life, his predominant interest.

This morning, the thought of the office was repulsive to him. He pictured the difficulties of satisfying his travellers, the friction with Blaise, the impossibility of straightening out those muddles which, though they were not of his own making, yet so vitally affected his credit. Even the thought of Miss Forrest was not pleasant. He hoped to goodness she would not be "silly." He had had enough of that kind of "silliness" for some time.

He wondered vaguely why the thing which had so interested him should now be so distasteful. . . .

Yet, when he returned home in the evening, the demands of the work he had been doing so occupied him that it was not till nine o'clock he remembered Mrs. Latimer's letter. He blushed guiltily, as if he had been discovered in some disreputable action. Thank goodness, she would never know that he had thus so soon and so completely forgotten her very existence.

He settled down to read the letter with attention.

It was very long. She did not plead with him; she made no reference to her remark in the train; she gave no hint as to what she ultimately desired. Instead, she gave him an abbreviated history of her life. She told him something of the years in the cloister, and the unlettered places of her mind; and then, coming to her marriage, she set out by somewhat tedious circumlocutions the facts that she had been delicately awakened to a wider knowledge of her own womanhood, and that the powers in her which had slept so long sought a fuller consummation. Jacob had to read some passages again and again before he gathered her drift, and even then he was doubtful whether he did not misunderstand her.

The letter ended abruptly, without even a signature.

"What does she want?" asked the perplexed Jacob. She had not asked him to come to see her, not even to write to her; but he knew how fond she was of dealing in suggestion. He tried to draw the true inferences from her attitude — the inferences that he supposed she wished him to draw.

He could see only one. She cared for him, not as a friend, but as a lover. There could be no doubt of it. He remembered the thousand and one indications she had given him.

The thought made him shiver, yet he set himself to picture the possibility. She had money. He need not be worried any more with the ungrateful task of obtaining orders for printing. They would live abroad, of course — Rome, Paris. He would see life, gain wonderful new experiences. He would have leisure to write. She would, no doubt, spoil him and adore him. He conceived this thought without vanity; it was merely an aspect of her "silliness." Yes; he would not only have time to write, but something to write about. He could certainly persuade her to live in Paris for half the year. He had always wanted to know Paris as intimately as he knew London. It was a brilliantly coloured picture he conceived as he studied the possibilities.

Yet never for one moment was he seriously tempted by it. It was not shame at the thought that the money would be Mrs. Latimer's — that he would, in a sense, be selling himself — which made the idea impossible. That he could put on one side by the dream of winning for himself success in literature; it would be a stimulus to make him work.

No; the insuperable difficulty was that he would have to play a part, to pretend that he cared, to take the woman in his arms. He knew that that was im-

possible for him. Not if she could offer him ten times the money she possessed, not if she gave it to him without other condition, could he pretend to make love to her. He had too much self-respect; he was too proud of his freedom.

He pictured her as he had seen her during the past fortnight, and one detail in particular came very vividly to his mind. She had been walking in front of him, and had slightly lifted for a moment the long skirts she always wore. He had seen for the first time that she turned in her toes as she walked. Never could Jacob Stahl make love to a woman who turned her toes in — it seemed to him representative, a summary of the whole situation. . . .

Her letter had moved him to pity. His resolution had been made, once and for all; but how was he to convey it without brutality, without suspicion of offence? He must write, but what could he say? He sat down to the composition of his letter.

After two false starts he found his line. The allegory she had told him in the boat suddenly presented itself. He perceived by a flash of inspiration that she had told him of her rejection of Mr. Cartwright's offer of marriage. He would make a false assumption from that knowledge.

He wrote in the character of adviser. He assumed that she had asked his guidance in this difficult question of remarriage, and while he admitted by implication that he knew her affection for himself was stronger than her feeling for the English chaplain's *locum tenens*, he implied also that that was an affection which, on the face of it, could never find expression. He did not in so many words remind her that he was married, but that fact was implicit in what he stated. He adopted her own methods, and wrote partly in parable. The inference he wished her to

draw was that she had better marry Mr. Cartwright, and leave Jacob Stahl to his loneliness. He did not think she could fail to understand him.

He heard no more from her during the week, and he certainly did not go to Beaulieu Mansions for news of her.

After that week he soon ceased to look out for a letter from her; he concluded that she had understood. . . .

It was not, indeed, until the following February that he once more received any intimation of her existence — a wedding-card from Rome. She had married her *locum*, with his two beautiful children.

Jacob wondered whether she had sent him the card in a boastful spirit, or whether it was a somewhat pathetic acknowledgment that she had taken his advice.

Also, he wondered whether the Rev. George Cartwright had ever noticed that his wife's toes turned in as she walked.

BOOK THREE

THE TURN OF THE ROAD

BOOK THREE

THE TURN OF THE ROAD

CHAPTER XVII

ASPECTS OF FAILURE

1.

The news with which Miss Forrest greeted Jacob when he arrived at the office on the Wednesday morning after his return from the river was of a kind that would have tried the spirit of a stronger man than Jacob Stahl. Briefly, the "copy" for Fennimore's booklet had been lost. The copy included a sketch by the studio and various pages of letterpress supplied by the firm of Fennimore and Company. The sketch could be repeated, but there was no duplicate of the manufacturers' letterpress either at Pennyquick Court or at the Strand showroom. Browning was in open rebellion. Little wonder, Jacob thought.

Browning turned up at the Strand offices soon after Jacob's arrival, and delivered himself of the whole scandal without reservation.

Jacob listened, played tunes on his teeth with a pencil, shrugged his shoulders, and looked unhappy. His dream of Blaise had been prophetic, but the reality was worse than his blackest anticipation.

Samson came in during Browning's recital. He went straight to the point without making the smallest acknowledgment of Jacob's presence.

"Well, what you've got to do," said Samson, addressing Browning, "is to go to Fennimore's and get a copy of their matter; they're bound to have one."

"Not damned likely!" growled Browning. "You don't catch me within five miles of Fennimore's again. I've been made to look fool enough up to now."

"Good Heavens!" ejaculated Samson; "can't you fake up some excuse? It's not the only time in the history of printing that an accident's happened."

"Don't have to be here long to learn that," replied Browning.

"I can't see," expostulated Samson, "why you can't make some excuse . . ."

"Oh! what's the good?" broke out Browning angrily. "I 'ad a devil of a job to get the order at all. I called nine times before I could see one of the managers, and then I 'ad to fill 'im up to the neck before I could get his attention. If the thing 'ad come through smart and pleased 'em, I might 'ave got a look in, but . . ." He broke off with a clumsy gesture of his arm, as if he would sweep away the whole firm of Price and Mallinson. Then he went on bitterly: "I told you what 'appened when I went to Fennimore's a week last We'n'sday. I didn't see nobody. Just 'ad a message from the counting-'ouse —'proof ain't in; call again.'"

"You hadn't been told that the proof would not be ready?" put in Jacob.

"Told? Not me. I 'adn't been told nothing. Just allowed to walk in and make a — fool of myself."

"When did you find out that the copy was lost, then?" Jacob asked, looking at Samson.

Samson ignored the question, and addressed himself to Browning. "Well, you'd better make the best of it," he said. "I've made new arrangements about

the sending in of orders, and the care of the matter. You may take my word for it that this sort of thing can't happen again. We are going into the whole question of internal organization. By the way, Mr. Stahl, I should like to have any suggestions you care to make on the subject."

That was Samson's final contribution to the topic of Fennimore's booklet. He went out quickly and slammed the door. He had put that little mistake behind him, as he had put so many others. He wasted no time in deploring the past. . . .

Jacob got rid of Browning at last. A very glum, resentful agent it was that started on his week's work — an agent who would approach possible customers with the feeling that his work would probably be wasted.

Jacob sighed heavily. He knew well enough that Browning's work had been killed, that the man would never obtain orders if he went to work in that spirit. Browning had far better find another job.

Jacob knew that. He saw that from a business point of view, the only wise thing to do was to sack Browning at once. But Jacob was sorry for the man. Why should Browning suffer for no fault of his own? Jacob's sense of justice was far stronger than his business ambitions.

And whether from similar reasons or because he had not seen the situation with Jacob's perception of essentials, neither did Samson suggest that Browning should go. So Browning stayed, and did not prosper.

Miss Forrest explained that it was known on the Monday afternoon after Jacob left, that no proof could reach Fennimore's on Wednesday morning, though it was not frankly admitted that the copy was lost until some days later.

"I wanted to write to Mr. Browning," said Miss Forrest, "but Mr. Samson would not let me."

"Oh, well, we'd better forget about it," said Jacob.

He heard a few days later that Blaise had not received any severe reprimand. Indeed, Blaise had laughed over the affair, and said it was just as well the stuff had been lost; there was no profit in it.

It was not Blaise, however, who was responsible for the mislaying of the papers. They turned up a couple of months later among the matter for another job upon which the estimators had been employed at the same time, and which had been turned down and put away.

The junior estimating clerk came up to Jacob to tell him the news.

"Is it too late to do the job now?" asked the clerk eagerly.

"You'd better ask Mr. Browning," replied Jacob grimly.

2.

The months that followed held no promise of any substantial reform in the business of Price and Mallinson. It could not be said that things went from bad to worse, but the organization at Pennyquick Court did not improve. Browning stayed on until March, and then left suddenly. Jacob never knew precisely what was the determining cause of his retirement. He did not see Browning for three weeks, and then Samson announced one morning that Pocklington would attend to any good inquiries that might come from the Eastern Midlands. Samson gave most unilluminating replies to Jacob's questions. It was left quite uncertain whether Browning or his employers had taken the initiative.

Mr. Glass threw a little light upon the question of motive, but could not answer the particular question — dismissed or resigned?

Jacob ran his fingers through his hair. "It makes it very difficult for me," he said.

Glass acquiesced. There were no reserves between him and Jacob now in their criticisms of the firm's methods. "He was with me in Manchester a month back," said Glass, and told a story which made it clear that "poor old Browning was just about sick of it." He told his story well, but at great length. The substance of it was that Browning had undertaken a series of visits with Glass to some of the less progressive firms in Manchester — firms which had proved unapproachable by Glass's methods. It is to be feared that those methods often included commissions to head-clerks, under-managers, and such small wielders of influence.

Browning had been Napoleonic. He had in more than one case almost forced an entry into the *sanctum sanctorum* of some managing director, and, arrived there, had delivered a powerful, if unconvincing, lecture on the power of modern advertisement exercised through the medium of distinctive printing. "Hoo — hoo — hoo!" laughed Glass, in an ecstasy of remembrance; "we fairly 'ad to run for it. Old Browning shouted 'em all down, till they called in the porter — six foot four, 'e must 'ave been. I cleared pretty quick, then, and old Browning wasn't long after me. I was laughin' so, I 'ad to lean up against the wall; but 'e was cursin', and swearin', and ravin' . . ."

The climax was finely dramatic. Glass swore that they had only one whisky, but Browning was drunk with Jovian fury and the power of his own eloquence. Nothing could hold him. He stalked out of the town

vituperating — little Glass at his heels, no doubt — until somewhere in the neighbourhood of Heaton Park he turned, and, looking down over the city, solemnly cursed it with a fearful curse.

Jacob had a picture of an Olympian Browning on some hill, an Olympian who towered, and shook a colossal fist at the reek of smoke and black dust that was Manchester, who cried: "Woe unto those who have flouted and misused me! Woe unto this unprogressive country of England!"

Glass had an idea that Browning had gone to America. There had been a strike of printers in Canada. . . .

There was another trouble for Jacob that autumn in addition to the perpetual worry that arose from the incapacity of the manager in Pennyquick Court, and the spasmodic, unrelated methods of Samson in the conduct of his campaign.

Miss Forrest returned from her holidays in September with the evident intention of prosecuting the initiative. From her own point of view the time was well chosen. She was looking and feeling her best. She had come back in health, with a glow of colour in her complexion, and a new impudence in her manner.

Unhappily for her schemes, Jacob was in a misogynic mood. Since the Mrs. Latimer episode he had conceived a temporary dislike to women's society. He wanted, in his own phrase, to be left alone, he did not want to be bothered. Doubtless his mind and imagination were jaded by the cares of his position. He had reached, even then, a stage of reading with determination every night, in order, primarily perhaps, to forget office cares, but also to prepare himself in the study of literature with a view to taking up some more congenial, less arduous profession than

that in which he was engaged. His ambitions towards a retiring fortune were almost dead.

Miss Forrest found herself held at a distance. Her pert remarks and meaning smiles met with no response. Mr. Stahl returned a blank stare to all her wiles, and evidenced a most praiseworthy devotion to the affairs of his office.

At first Miss Forrest was piqued, and tried fresh devices — a look of sadness, half suppressed sighs. And even in the face of all rebuffs she might have persisted, had not an equally eligible and less recalcitrant suitor presented himself.

One morning in November, Jacob noticed that his typist was wearing a pearl ring on the third finger of her left hand. He was not naturally observant of such things, but there was no overlooking the ring that morning; it might almost be said that the ring was wearing Miss Forrest.

At first Jacob was relieved, but he was soon made aware of the true significance of Miss Forrest's engagement. She had been almost ideal as a secretary, the bright spot in his business life, the one person upon whose efficiency he could rely. Now she had fits of abstraction from which no hint as to the demands of affairs could arouse her, and when an open, if mild, reproof was administered she showed unmistakable signs of temper. She had lost all interest in the business of Price and Mallinson, her work became careless, she forgot instructions, and ceased entirely from those small acts of initiative in the arrangement of business papers which had been such an assistance to the overtried Jacob.

He was quite relieved when Miss Forrest left early in April to fulfil her proper destiny. His new typist was decently plain, and wore spectacles — a willing girl enough, but rather stupid. . . .

3.

During his second year at Price and Mallinson's Jacob was quite conscious that his work had degenerated — the fire had gone out of it, he worked mechanically, and avoided doing more than was absolutely necessary. Sometimes he was behind even with that, necessary, work.

The chief part of his occupation was the writing of copy and the conception of "ideas," both for his own three travellers and also for the town-travellers, whose organization was not under his control. The latter duty he was inclined to shirk when opportunity offered. He received neither blame nor praise in any case, and it was fatally easy to scamp some of his work. He was so oppressed with the sense of failure, the impossibility of showing a profit to the firm.

In this he was not alone. The head estimator, who had been with Price and Mallinson for fifteen years, shook his head and looked very despondent. He was accountant as well as estimator, and knew to a nicety what the balance of profit, or loss, on Jacob's department amounted to. Jacob had many conversations with the estimator, and they confirmed each other in despondency.

Samson, however, had abated not one jot of his red-hot enthusiasm and optimism. He was still buying new machinery, conceiving fresh plans of campaign. He had always wanted to have a complete advertising service, and he was working steadily towards that end.

In the spring of that year the firm of Fletcher and Hill was dissolved, and Samson engaged Jacob's old colleague, Farmer, to take charge of the new advertising department at Price and Mallinson's.

It transpired that George P. Hill had over-reached himself, or had strained the conservatism of Mr.

Fletcher to the breaking point. Fletcher had wanted to see quicker returns on the outlay, Hill wanted a further expansion. Farmer reported that Hill had come out of the smash with his capital almost intact, despite the deed of partnership, since it had been Fletcher who had broken the contract by prematurely terminating the agreement, and he had in consequence dropped between ten and twenty thousand pounds. Hill had other irons in the fire, but for the moment he had accepted a twelve months' contract with a leading daily paper at an unprecedented salary. Hill was bound to succeed or fail magnificently. Poor, unimaginative Fletcher returned to his former line of business. He kept out of the bankruptcy court for nearly eight years after the dissolution of partnership.

Jacob was sorry that the firm of Fletcher and Hill had come to grief; he took an imaginative pleasure in witnessing success, he disliked to hear of failure. Farmer viewed the matter more philosophically. It appeared that he had foreseen the doom of his employers' venture, and had had a private understanding for some time with Samson. Jacob saw that in the advertising world the failures were not found among men of the Hill and Farmer stamp.

Jacob saw very clearly, also, that he himself was not of this stamp. He found ample cause for excusing himself in regard to his work at Price and Mallinson. It was quite easy to argue with apparent force that no one could have expected him to make a success of that department of his. How, for instance, could he have averted that great misfortune which occurred in the autumn of his second year and was the proximate cause of the firm's change of plan? Yet he saw that another man might have done better, might have fought far more strenuously than he had fought; might have displayed greater powers of in-

sight, more ability in detecting weak places, more resource in strengthening or eradicating them; chief of all, a man who had had more "grit" might have struggled with, and perhaps overcome, the inertia of Blaise and the exuberance of Samson — Samson who could not be content to establish one development on a sound basis before essaying some further expansion. Samson's theory of accountancy was to write off working expenses to capital account; he was always spending and calling it investment.

The great misfortune which brought matters to a head was the mishandling of a large order for catalogues obtained by Mr. Charles Glass. It was to be a catalogue *de luxe*, a rare and beautiful specimen of illustration, printing, and arrangement; not an old catalogue reconstructed, but a fine new work of art. This ideal was to cost the manufacturers two thousand pounds according to Price and Mallinson's estimate, and the estimate had been accepted. Samson was jubilant, even the head estimator was not dissatisfied. He told Jacob that it meant between two and three hundred pounds' profit even when Glass's commission was paid.

Heaven only knows exactly how that order was wrecked. It was not the block-maker's fault. Pulls of all the blocks were approved separately, and though Blaise complained that when you were working off a run of ten thousand copies it was impossible to get an impression such as the block-makers obtained, still it might surely have been possible to obtain far clearer impressions than those that were ultimately turned out. However, nothing was right. Despite the scrupulous proof-reading by the manufacturers themselves, there were numerous mistakes in the letterpress, errors in prices amongst others which could not be overlooked — the final of the type correction must

have been neglected. Even the binders were at fault; in more than two thousand copies there were mistakes in pagination.

The head of the firm came down from Lancashire and had an interview with the partners. Samson was called in, and, later, Blaise and Glass. The final result of the conference was that the whole of the edition *de luxe* was thrown back upon Price and Mallinson's hands. Instead of a profit of between two and three hundred pounds, there was a loss of nearly one thousand five hundred pounds — the difference is accounted for by the fact that the manufacturers bought up the blocks at cost price. The catalogues, which should have had a value of four shillings apiece to the manufacturers, were sold for waste-paper. Jacob kept one of the worst specimens as a memento.

Then came the announcement that the partners "had had enough." Expenses were to be reduced. Blaise was to be dismissed, the country travellers were to be dismissed, and, since high salaries were to be stopped, Farmer's services were not to be retained, nor, finally, and most pertinently, were the services of Mr. Stahl required any longer. He had two months' notice.

It was not Jacob's fault. The partners exempted him from any share in the blame which was being so freely distributed. He had the satisfaction of knowing that he was not being sacked for incompetence, but he was not content with the part he had played. He had blamed himself for many faults of omission; he felt that he might have done more than he had attempted.

CHAPTER XVIII

ASPECTS OF SUCCESS

1.

That second year at Price and Mallinson's had been fruitful of other experience than that gained during office hours. Looking back upon it afterwards, Jacob traced many curious influences that came into his life at that time. He called them "curious" because he found in them a quality of preparation. As he lived these experiences, he regarded them as he regarded all other experience — as the common, insignificant incidents of life; but in review he saw them as significant, he thought he could trace in them distinctive elements which had moulded his character and prepared him for the future. . . .

In the February of that year he received a most unexpected letter from Eric. Jacob's conscience reproved him. It was nearly eighteen months since he had seen his brother; he might at least have made some inquiry after that expected baby. He had not forgotten it, but he had let the time slip by, and then he had been ashamed either to write or call at the Putney house. From childhood onwards there had been no sort of intimacy between him and Eric, but Jacob knew that he had been remiss. He knew also that his failure in this instance was characteristic of his general slackness, his lack of grit. He was most condemnably careless about such things as these, through sheer inertia.

Eric's letter was almost cordial. He seemed eager

to know how Jacob was prospering, and why he had never been out to Putney. The baby was twelve months old.

Jacob went to Putney the next Sunday afternoon. It was a fine day, and he travelled on the top of a bus all the way from Oxford Street. He had an experience during the journey. In Knightsbridge the bus was visited by a ticket inspector. Jacob did not notice him until he heard a voice say, "May I see your ticket, please." He did not then look up immediately, but as he was searching for his ticket, uncertain whether he had not perhaps thrown it away, something in the tone of the voice recurred to him as familiar, and recalled a memory of 63, Acacia Avenue.

He looked up without identifying the association and found himself confronted by Woodhouse. He was wearing a long, shabby overcoat and a peaked cap, the only uniform of his office. He bore the marks of the habitual drunkard on his face, and he had allowed his beard to grow, but it was unmistakably Woodhouse.

Jacob blushed; he felt embarrassed. "Hallo!" he said. "What are you doing here?"

"Inspecting tickets," replied Woodhouse calmly. "Can't you find yours?"

"I'm afraid I must have dropped it . . ." began Jacob. He was going on to say more — he wanted to ask if he could not be of any use — but Woodhouse cut in with "All right. Doesn't matter," and turned away. Before Jacob could decide upon any line of action, Woodhouse was gone.

It was at once a disturbing experience and a cause for self-congratulation. Jacob was sorry for Woodhouse; he would gladly have done anything he could to help him; but he could not avoid the pleasure of

making a comparison between Woodhouse's state and his own.

Jacob was then in the stage of decline with regard to his enthusiasm for the business of advertising; this object-lesson pulled him up for a time. On that particular Sunday afternoon it influenced him to a more optimistic attitude when he met Eric. Failure, like success, was relative. By the time he reached Putney, Jacob was convinced that he was, relatively, quite distinctly a success.

He found a subtle change in Eric and his wife, more especially in the latter. She talked to Jacob as she had never talked before, asking him about the detail of his life with genuine interest. She had not lost her interest in matters of scholarship — occasional references made that clear — but it was no longer the dominant interest of her life.

Jacob was formally introduced to the dominant interest after tea. He was in his nursery, a large, bright, airy room on the second floor. Eric followed, but he seemed out of place. Here was a book which no volume in his library could help him to understand. His remarks were banal, and he knew it. When he played the father to that inarticulate, year-old suggestion of humanity, he was — for the first time in Jacob's experience — most obviously posing.

There was no pose in the manner of Doris. She was not a pretty woman; she had little charm either of person or manner. Until this visit, Jacob had regarded her as a fit mate for his brother; he had judged her scholar and pedant, absorbed in the dry formulæ of text and argument, who judged even fiction by form rather than content. This afternoon, however, his wondering, tentative mind had been puzzled by her sudden interest in himself, and when they adjourned

to the nursery, he watched her with curiosity as she took her child from the arms of the nurse.

Many observers — women among them, for their first attention would have been given to the child — might have missed what Jacob was fortunate enough to see. It was an indescribable thing — save, perhaps, in the language of sentiment and hyperbole — a mere change of expression. He saw the disappearance for a moment of that front we all present to the world; the attitude of criticism, defence, reserve of judgment, and restraint of expression. It is a most necessary attitude. When it is relaxed and there is no fit substitute, we present ourselves as maudlin, feeble, doting creatures. Doris Stahl looked at her child without criticism or restraint, but she did not appear maudlin, feeble or doting — as some women do in like circumstances. Jacob saw in her face one look of adoration, and glimpsed the potentialities of self-sacrifice, of self-elimination that look conveyed. He thought it a wonderful transfiguration. He thought that his sister-in-law was a beautiful woman at that moment.

She caught his eye upon her the next minute, and smiled at him — a smile of understanding. He came closer and looked down at his small nephew. "What exquisite little fingers he has!" Jacob remarked. He had often been conscious of his own futility in that house, of his utter inability to say the right thing; this time, though he received no congratulations on his insight, he knew that his remark had been supremely happy.

"Hasn't he?" replied Doris. "And toes." She exhibited them.

Jacob had been moved. He felt an accession of delight in this pink, delicate-skinned little parody of

humanity. He bent over it and kissed its fragrantly warm cheek. The child gurgled and smiled.

"That's oo's Uncoo Jimminy-pimminy," said Doris.

Jacob was immensely gratified that the child had smiled at him, the more so that Eric's essay was presently repulsed.

"It's your glasses he doesn't like, dear," suggested Doris, who had removed her own. But when Eric's pince-nez had been taken off, the child still rejected his father's attention.

"I think your moustache pricks him," explained Doris; and Eric agreed.

Jacob wondered if his own clean-shaven face had won him the baby's regard. He was more inclined to believe that that sudden glow of devotion which had animated him — some reflex, perhaps, of the mother's love — had had something to do with it. . . .

After that visit he went more often to his brother's house. He was never quite at ease when he was alone with Eric; there still remained that consciousness of inferiority, the fear of Eric's erudition; but with Doris, Jacob was at ease now. He treated her as a friend, gave her confidences which he did not give to Eric, and never failed to visit the nursery when he called. His nephew had accepted him as a privileged admirer. Jacob was even permitted to hold the precious bundle in his arms, and passed successfully through the ordeal. The nursery was the one room in the Putney house in which he felt completely at home. He had conceived a genuine affection for Eric's child; but doubtless he would have regarded it with different eyes if his first ventures had been greeted with a whimper. There are few men who are not susceptible to this flattery of infants and young children.

2.

On the Sunday evening after he had seen Woodhouse on the Putney omnibus, Jacob, after a short struggle with himself, went to St. Mark's for service. He felt that he must do something for Woodhouse, and, like many people who had come under Barker's influence at one time or another, he had retained the belief in the Vicar's power for good over others, when he had come to doubt the value of the Vicar's influence in his own case. Cecil Barker was a wonderful resource for those who had the will but not the power, to help.

During the eighteen months which had elapsed since he had seen, or heard from, Barker, Jacob had lost much of his resentment, while he had to some extent regained his early admiration for the Vicar's creed and practice of self-sacrifice. Nevertheless, he went to Camden Town on Sunday evening with a doubt in his mind as to the nature of the reception he might justly expect, and he did not definitely make up his mind to go on to " 63 " until after the sermon.

That decided him. It was on the subject of the prodigal son, and Jacob felt that after such a public expression of the need for universal tolerance and for the extension of the divine principle of forgiveness, the Vicar could not refuse to extend a hand of welcome to one who came to plead the cause of so prodigal a son as Woodhouse.

Possibly Jacob had, also, at the back of his mind the wish to make a further test of the Vicar's profession. Jacob remembered the details of Woodhouse's expulsion from his curacy. It would be interesting, undoubtedly, to see whether this were a " case " which would be taken up again.

Yet Jacob hesitated to accept Barker's hospitality,

even the freely extended hospitality of Sunday supper, without making some amend; and he told Willis that he would wait in the hall until the Vicar came in. Willis raised no objection.

Barker was magnificent. He greeted Jacob with that intimate cordiality which just avoids effusiveness. "So glad to see you, my dear fellow," he said. "You must come up to my room and have a chat after supper. I want to hear all about yourself. You'll find some old friends in the dining-room."

The only friend that Jacob found was Fred Boyle; but after supper some interesting information was obtained from that source. Jacob's turn for an interview came last on the list. It was explained by the Vicar that he would have more time then, and Jacob had not far to go, whereas others had a long journey to make before they reached home.

Jacob agreed willingly, and while he waited he and Fred had a long conversation in the farther room. The talk was almost exclusively confined to the topic of Philip Laurence and Freda Cairns. Mrs. Latimer's observation, or intuition, had been justified.

Fred began somewhat hypocritically. He was inclined at the outset to adopt an attitude of censure, but Jacob's eagerness for particulars, and his attitude of complete detachment with regard to the moral aspect of the case, warmed the narrator to a franker statement.

"Oh, there's been no end of a dust-up down here," said Fred. "They're both frightfully — what d'you call it? — unregenerate."

Miss Cairns, it appeared, though converted from her attachment to that dimly visualized married philanderer who had made first claim to her devotion, had now most deliberately thrown her bonnet over the windmills. She was openly living with Philip Lau-

rence, though there was no just cause of impediment why they should not have been joined together in holy matrimony. It was a declaration of independence. Freda was a second Mary Woolstonecraft, and eager to uphold her faith in a principle by her public practice and profession. Laurence had written a play on the subject which had been barred by the censor, but had been acted by some play-producing society at Notting Hill, and was obtainable in book form.

Jacob wondered how it had chanced that he had come across no reference to all these doings, but he read his daily paper with little interest, and for some months past had been reading science and philosophy in preference to current literature of the lighter kind. He determined to get that play; Fred told him that it was called "The Independents."

These two splendid sinners, gamblers both, had been much in evidence at "63" in the autumn of the past year. Twelve months before, the Vicar had exercised all his powers of charm and persuasion to prevent the liaison, and had failed. For some time thereafter the two delinquents had been anathematized at "63," held up to public scorn at the Sunday supper-table. But one Sunday evening at the end of September they had turned up to service, had been spotted from the pulpit, and once more made the subject of suggestions to the Deity, and of special attention in more direct ways. According to Fred, the Vicar was still hopeful, and there could be no question that he both admired and applauded the daring of these two gamblers, though he deplored their methods. He had preached two or three very pertinent sermons on the subject of marriage, and the opponents of that sacrament had had perforce to listen in silence, but had stoutly upheld their own views at supper. Fred chuckled over his reminiscences with obvious glee,

and then pulled himself together, and said: "Seems rather dreadful, doesn't it?"

Jacob avoided that question. "Have they been down lately?" he asked.

"Not since Christmas," replied Fred. "I fancy Mr. Laurence was beginning to get a bit humpy with the Vicar."

Jacob was picturing the firm white chin and smooth short neck of Freda Cairns; they were the outstanding features which seemed to typify her in his mind. He had almost forgotten her face and expression; she had pretty hair, he remembered. He was thinking that she had powers of determination which Laurence probably lacked. She would doubtless have continued to face the Vicar, to find joy in the encounter, while she lost none of her admiration for his ideal of self-sacrifice. Probably she believed that she was in some sense carrying out those principles; saw herself as a champion of woman's independence. But Laurence had been bored by the Vicar's importunity. It was conceivable that he might have gone through the ceremony of marriage merely to avoid being harassed. Had Freda perceived that he was weakening, and agreed in avoiding the dangerous advocate of woman's enslavement?

Jacob cross-questioned the willing Fred, and found some evidence for the truth of his conjectures in the matter.

"She's a rum un," was Fred's summary of Freda; "and she's got some pluck, too, no fear!" The last phrase was not a restatement of Freda's courage, but Fred's method of emphasis — a few years later he would have said "Not 'arf!"

Jacob wondered how long the liaison would last. He did not trust Laurence, neither did he like him. He was sorry that that fresh, vigorous young woman

should have fallen into the hands of a man with such a record.

Upstairs in the Vicar's study, the topic came up again when Woodhouse had been disposed of. Barker was going to re-establish Woodhouse; was going to make inquiries at the offices of the Omnibus Company, and bring the degenerate into the fold again. He seemed to have no doubt that he would be successful. Jacob gathered that the Vicar would forgive until seventy times seven.

On the question of the great declaration of independence, the Vicar said that Freda was a splendid young woman, and would come to recognize that she was being led away by the false ideas which her father had preached, albeit without the least wish that they should ever be put into practice by his own daughter.

"She has courage," said the Vicar, "fine courage, and one day she will do a great work for me. The tragedy of life is despair; everything is possible to those who have courage. Isn't that true, my dear fellow?"

Jacob thought it was, and wished he had more courage himself. And although he did not give utterance to the wish, the Vicar was evidently of the same opinion, for this access of courage was the gift which he later suggested to the Deity as especially suitable for his "dear friend Stahl. . . ."

Jacob went down to St. Mark's three or four times that spring, and learnt that Woodhouse had been found and was repentant; no doubt he had not found the liberty of an omnibus inspector's life sufficient compensation for the arduousness of the duties imposed. He was taking the Antol cure for the second time, and, though he could not be reinstated in the St. Mark's curacy, the Vicar hoped to get him a post of some kind in the Colonies, or as a missionary. . . .

In May, the Vicar, who had been certainly working very hard and was looking worn out, went away for a holiday, and stayed away for three months. He did not write when he returned, and Jacob did not go to St. Mark's afterwards, partly from idleness and partly from disinclination.

He had regained some of his first admiration for Cecil Barker's individuality, but he was as far as ever from believing in Barker's religious specific. It was the man, not the creed, that appealed, and Jacob believed that the Vicar would have led no less self-sacrificing a life had he been an agnostic. As it was, Jacob preferred not to cross his will with that of so strong an opponent. He had no fear of being converted, but it was tiresome. One could not argue with the Vicar — he never condescended to argument — and it put one in a false position. Finally, one saw very little of him at Sunday supper; and on the last two occasions that Jacob had been to "63" he had not been favoured with a private interview.

It may be noted that Jacob read Laurence's play, "The Independents," and was not greatly impressed by it. He thought the conception and style unworthy of Laurence's reputed genius, and he was more than ever sorry for Freda. He thought she had made a mistake.

3.

At the beginning of October, some three weeks before he received his notice from Price and Mallinson, Jacob met Hubert Meredith for the second time. They met by chance, in the Strand, as Jacob was going back to his office after lunch.

It was nearly eighteen months since their first introduction at Lee-Perry's, and in the interval Jacob

had suffered much experience, and had developed in many ways of which he was barely conscious. But at that instant recognition — their greeting could hardly have been more ready if the meeting had been prearranged — Jacob became suddenly conscious of the change in himself.

He looked back and saw himself as it were a stranger, reading " The Statue and the Bust " in Lee-Perry's drawing-room, talking to Meredith in lame, half-confessional phrases, explaining his desire to write, his ineptitude. He saw himself as strangely boyish and undeveloped, and from his present attitude of experience he observed that shy, halting replica of himself as he might have observed an inferior, with something of contempt.

It was a brief but very brilliant vision, and he remembered that he had had such visions before — had thus looked back upon a self which, with all its likeness to his present self, stood for something that he had outgrown. . . .

" You surely haven't been in Cornwall all this time? " he said, as he shook hands with Meredith.

There was a noticeable outward change in Meredith. He was wearing a rough tweed suit, a soft hat, and a canvas shirt with a turn-down collar; and the pallor of his complexion had given place to a deep, solid brown, quite unlike the superficial sunburn of the clerk returned from his fortnight's holiday. This swarthy colour of his emphasized by contrast the frost of white hair at his temples but it detracted to some extent from that look of intellectuality which had been Jacob's first impression of the man.

" I have," replied Meredith, " every minute of it. I only came up yesterday."

" You look younger," said Jacob.

" And you look older," replied Meredith.

"I am," returned Jacob, "naturally. It's your unnatural youth that's remarkable."

Meredith laughed lightly. "I've been in the sun," he said.

"Obviously," agreed Jacob.

"And you've been cooped up in this filthy, unhealthy city?"

"My Lord! yes," broke out Jacob; "and I've hardly realized it till this minute. You smell of the sea."

"It's still a source of amazed thankfulness to me," replied Meredith.

"I know!" said Jacob, a little surprised at his own quickness of apprehension. "Fortunately for us Londoners, our sense of smell becomes partly atrophied; we are not conscious of the stench of this vile place." He was thinking how the reek of London had disgusted him as he said good-bye to Mrs. Latimer in Paddington Station, after that fortnight's holiday on the river. "Perhaps the coming of those things will improve matters a little," he added, and pointed to a motor which was passing.

Meredith turned to regard the phenomenon with interest; very few years ago a motor was stared at with wonder in London streets. "I haven't seen one before in England," said Meredith. "But it's only substituting one stench for another, isn't it?"

They stood silently for a moment, regarding the very visible escape of vapour at the rear of the car.

"How long are you staying in London?" asked Jacob, when the car was hidden by the traffic. "I want to talk to you about that smell of the sea."

"It depends on this," returned Meredith, displaying a big, oblong brown-paper parcel that he had been carrying under his arm.

"A novel?" asked Jacob.

Meredith nodded. "Two months ago I sent it up to ——'s," he said, mentioning a well-known publisher, "and they wrote to me last week, 'regretting, etc. . . .' So I thought I had better come up and see to the thing myself."

"The best work doesn't get a chance," said Jacob, quoting Mrs. Latimer.

"Rot!" replied Meredith.

"Glad you think so," said Jacob. "Are you going straight to another publisher's now?"

"Would you care to read it first?" asked Meredith.

Jacob flushed with pleasure. "I say, that's awfully good of you," he said boyishly. "Of course I should; but won't it mean keeping you up in town?"

"I don't know. This is Friday afternoon. I dare say I shan't lose anything by keeping it back till Monday morning. You could have finished it by then."

"Oh yes, easily! I say, will you come and have supper with me on Sunday evening at my digs? and then we can talk everything over, and you can take your book back with you all ready for first thing Monday morning.

"I should like to," said Meredith.

4.

The manuscript Jacob took home with him that evening was undoubtedly a fair copy of the original; that fine, orderly, legible caligraphy could never have been maintained by any man in the throes of composition; moreover, there were few corrections. Jacob marvelled at the patience of a man who could thus copy out his own work. He knew that it was quite usual for a writer to undertake the task, and he had heard that it was the best method of achieving that

final polish which is so essential in the making of literature. But he admitted, as he would not have done five years before — when any task seemed possible in imagination — that he was incapable of taking the enormous pains necessary to achieve such results. He thought of his own feeble novel, written in a month and never afterwards corrected — that poor thing had been typed. He had the manuscript somewhere, still with all the errors and lacunæ of the transcriber uncorrected and unfilled. It made him ashamed of that miserable facile thing, when he realized the infinite care that had gone to the making of the work he was reading.

And yet he was not aroused to any enthusiasm of admiration by the reading of Meredith's book. He approved the English of it —" sculptured " was a word that suggested itself to his mind as descriptive; he approved the sentiment which clearly animated it; and the many passages which described the aspects and moods of Nature seemed to him to be perfectly written and conceived. But the movement of the story and the characters who played their parts in the development of the drama did not hold his interest. He found the characters lacking in some quality which he could not at the moment define, and the narrative, as such, aroused no urgent desire to witness the consummation. . . .

When Meredith arrived, Jacob was still searching for some expression of his criticism. He wanted to be just, he wanted to be thorough, and he wanted to prove his own capacity — three needs not easy of reconciliation.

He began at once, and began badly by saying: " I like your book immensely." That was a commonplace which said nothing and yet compromised his detailed criticism.

Meredith appraised the cliché at its proper value. "Why not?" he said.

Jacob laughed. "I'm going to try to tell you all that," he said. "What do you smoke?"

Meredith smoked a pipe and his own tobacco, and when his bodily comfort was assured, Jacob took up his rôle of critic.

He began with the virtues of the book, but he was horribly oppressed by the memory of Mrs. Latimer's criticism of his own gropings in fiction. He found himself comparing her attitude and his own; he noticed that he was unconsciously using her phrases.

Meredith listened in silence for a minute or two. He was leaning back in his chair, one hand behind his head, the other hanging by a crooked forefinger to the bowl of his pipe. He intruded his comment as soon as Jacob slackened.

"That'll do for cackle," said Meredith; "I'm a fairly good judge of my own in that respect. What about the 'osses?"

"Well," replied Jacob, "you seem to have a wonderful gift for comprehending people in the flesh, but . . ."

"You haven't found evidences of my comprehension on paper?"

"It isn't life, you know," said Jacob; "at least, not life as I know it. People never do talk as yours do. Your characters are all poets, more or less."

"You're a believer in the realistic school, eh?" asked Meredith.

"I don't know that I'd ever put the question to myself," replied Jacob; "but now I see that . . . yes, I suppose I am."

Meredith smoked in silence for a few seconds; then he took his pipe out of his mouth, and said: "The trouble with you fellows is that you won't make any

allowance for the fact that a novel is necessarily a work of art in its treatment. You must see, for instance, that the most realistic of novels must be something more than reporting. You are faced inevitably in the first place with the necessity for condensation, or, in other words, selection. And, once you've granted that — as you must — why not grant the whole contention, and admit that a novelist must present life through a medium which cannot, *ex hypothesi*, be either photographic or stenographic? "

"Yes, that's all right," agreed Jacob; "but — I don't quite know how to put it — there are big differences in the medium, and in the way it's used. For instance, you may describe a character in your own words — analyze him, you know — or you may draw him by letting him express himself by his speech and actions."

"The medium is the same in each case," commented Meredith; "the style of the writer."

"Well, then," said Jacob, "suppose the character is to express himself; you can either represent him as using the language you use yourself, or put words into his mouth such as that man would have actually used; the kind of language, you know, not the very words you may have overheard such a person speak."

"Oh yes," assented Meredith. "But if I do that — the latter thing, I mean — I am forced to use what I consider an unnecessarily elaborate method of depicting the character, and a method which is not in keeping with the general feeling of the book."

"We have got to grips now," said Jacob. "I hope you don't think me very cheeky to set up my opinion against yours. I find this immensely interesting."

Meredith got out of his chair and stood with his back to the fire. "It'll do me no end of good," he

said. "I've been living a hermit's life for the last eighteen months. It isn't good for one. One wants a certain amount of opposition. However, don't let us get on to side issues yet. What's your plea for realism in conversation?"

"My plea is," replied Jacob, "that when I read of a man using fine phrases, such as I know that that man, as you have described him, would be incapable of using in real life, I have a sensation of unreality. I am conscious of the — the operator, or the artist, if you prefer it. I can see all the strings."

"All readers don't feel like that, though."

"Not all critical readers?"

"That depends; even a critical reader may have powers of imagination."

Here was another version of Mrs. Latimer's "Do leave something to the imagination." Jacob, in the later days of his companionship with that slighted lady, had often chafed at her insistence on this point. He had conceived a contempt for the attitude he believed to be represented; he had thought her sentimental and early-Victorian. It was strange to meet the same attitude in Meredith, a man whom he regarded with feelings of very different quality from those he had conceived for Mrs. Latimer.

"I wonder if I'm lacking in imagination?" said Jacob, after a pause. Mrs. Latimer had made the accusation on one occasion, but he had not believed her.

"No — I should say not," was Meredith's pronouncement.

"You see," explained Jacob, "I want data, clearly defined premisses; in life I want actualities, as a stimulant for my imagination. Give me correct drawing in a picture or in a novel, and I can work inwards or outwards — whichever it is — from that. But hazy

outlines don't provide me with the material I'm looking for."

"There's a good deal to be said for that point of view," interpolated Meredith.

"Now, as an instance," continued Jacob, "there's your Henry Mercer; he's a London commercial traveller, and you say distinctly that he is not of the educated classes. He says in one place — do you remember, when he gets to Truro before he was expected? — he says, I believe, 'I had the good fortune to catch an earlier train.' Now, that gives me the picture of a cultured and rather pedantic speaker. I work on from that suggestion, despite the fact that you say he was nothing of the kind, and Henry Mercer takes a shape you never intended. If you had made him say, 'Caught the 10.30, by a bit of luck,' I should have found him consistent."

"It's quite a good point." Meredith had sat down again, and was once more nursing the bowl of his pipe in his hand, staring into the fire. "But what one has to do is to express the typical . . ."

"Oh, but . . ." began Jacob.

"One minute," said Meredith. "Yes, of course, the language of Mercer is not in one sense typical. But, in another way, is the language of Mrs. Gamp? Can you really imagine Mrs. Gamp saying in her vernacular that 'fiddlestrings were weakness to express her nerves?' Have you ever met such a brilliant analogist in low life as Sam Weller? The realism of Dickens and his school consists, not in reporting the slang and cant phrases of the day, but in inventing a form of speech which shall definitely represent a type to the mind of the reader. Follow me?"

"Why invent a language when there is a representative vernacular in use?" asked Jacob.

"What individual are you to choose as a model?" replied Meredith. "You will find that in any society, from unemployable to duke, no two members use precisely the same phraseology."

"I would choose an individual who, in my opinion, was best representative of his society. Just as, surely, you choose a representative character."

"But that gives no scope for the exercise of art," countered Meredith. "Does art count for nothing?"

"Can you tell me," said Jacob, "just exactly what is art?"

Meredith failed to do more than explain what art meant to himself, and Jacob indicated the failure. He was even clear enough in his thought to grasp and state the fact that Meredith was not defining art, but its application, and that this was just about as useful a definition as if, in answer to the question, "What is steam?" one were to give the reply: "A force used to drive steam-engines."

"Well, anyway, I can tell you what art is not," said Meredith. "It is not realism."

Jacob smiled apologetically. "I expect you think me an awful ass, don't you?" he said. "And I have really no right to question you — I mean that I'm frightfully ignorant about these things . . ." He broke off, and ran his fingers through his hair.

"Don't blither," returned Meredith. "What were you going to say?"

"Only that you make an assertion, 'realism is not art,' but you don't say why."

"Well, the obvious answer is that the artist must bring something to his work, must define something more than a mere replica of his subject. He must express an attitude, in fact. And then, as I see it, his object is to universalize the type, to write or paint or carve something that shall be representative for all

time of that particular idea. It may be a small idea or a very great one — the point is that the artist crystallizes all the elements of that idea into one masterpiece. Nature never does that — not even in humanity. There was never, for instance, any human being so bad or so good that he could represent the essential qualities of badness or goodness. Do you see what I mean?"

"Yes," replied Jacob, very thoughtfully —"yes, I do; and I hadn't thought of art like that before. But . . ."

"Well?"

"I still think you are wrong in your treatment of such characters as Mercer."

"Good for you. Get it off your chest."

"Well, you're — you're working in monochrome when you ought to be working in colour. You haven't invented a representative language for Mercer and his sort — you've just used your own all the way along. As I've told you — and I meant every word — when you write descriptions, especially descriptions of Nature, you do it, I think, perfectly. Nearly every one of those passages of yours — and there are a good many, and pretty long ones — I read at least twice."

"You'll have to come out of the advertising business, old chap," replied Meredith. "You've a gift for criticism. I'm damned if you haven't partly convinced me."

"I wish I *could* get out of the advertising business," lamented Jacob, and thus the conversation was shifted to other topics. Presently supper was brought and eaten, and afterwards, following an interval of discursiveness which brought them both to the verge of boredom, they returned to the subject of Meredith's novel.

"It *must* stand now," Meredith remarked thoughtfully; and Jacob was suddenly scared at the thought of the mischief his argument might have done.

"Oh, of course," he said. "You mustn't take any notice of my criticisms. I really know absolutely nothing about it."

"I think you know a lot," said Meredith. "Look here, haven't you got some work of your own that I could see?"

Jacob thought of his novel. "No," he said definitely. "It's very good of you to say that my criticism is worth anything, but it's a fact that I can't write."

"You ought to be able to write," said Meredith. "Why don't you stick to it?"

"No time," replied Jacob. . . .

There was one other point in this indicative evening with Meredith which had some influence on Jacob Stahl's later life. They had returned to the subject of art, and Meredith, by way of parrying one of his companion's questions, asked: "Well, what is your own theory?"

"Do you know, I don't believe I've got any theories," replied Jacob.

5.

He returned to that thought when Meredith had gone. He did not go to bed immediately, but sat on by the fire thinking. Meredith's companionship had braced and encouraged him. He reflected that if he had had such a friend as this in the past, his own life might have developed on different lines. There had only been one man with whom he had been able thus to exchange ideas — Owen Bradley — a man who had worked by his side in the architect's office

in which he had spent so many futile years before he had launched out into his disastrous venture into private practice. And Bradley had been the teacher. There had been no interchange of ideas between him and Jacob. Bradley had been in some sense a hero, and above criticism, although he had proved a failure as a friend. He was a success in other departments — one of the best-known architects in London now — but he had not had the capacity to carry his friend with him. Bradley lacked sympathy, perhaps, or it may have been that such success as he had achieved could only be won by a strict concentration on his object, which left no energy for the exactions of friendship. But Meredith . . .

So by analysis Jacob returned to introspection. Why had he been a failure? He admitted the failure. He knew that his job at Price and Mallinson's would not last much longer. He had not sufficient interest in the aims and methods of advertising. He shrank from the thought of finding other work in the same field. It meant a prolonged and arduous endeavour to sell some commodity in which he took no interest, of which he knew nothing, and which might quite conceivably be worthless — at the best, not worth the money that was paid for it. It meant selling for the joy of salesmanship — an utterly selfish joy in such a case, for it could not conceivably benefit any other person, and might, if he sold rotten commodities, do possible harm. . . .

Farmer talked of educating the public, of teaching them to buy this or that, of putting such healthy foods as oatmeal or cocoa on the breakfast-table. He and Farmer and Hill were the teachers — teachers who had never spent one moment's thought on the nature of the foods that they taught the people to buy. They did not ask Tom how his oatmeal

was prepared, nor Dick what other constituents he put into his cocoa. They were teachers who had no knowledge to impart, who taught because they made money out of it. This talk of education was rot — unmitigated rot — a puerile sophistry that no intelligent man could believe. If Tom came on to the market with an oatmeal made out of refuse, without one particle of nourishment in it, would not Farmer and Hill and all their crowd educate the people to buy the trash, if Tom had the capital to advertise it freely enough? And would not the people continue to buy the trash so long as it was not proved to be positively harmful — and buy it at the rate of 25 per cent. for the article, 25 per cent. for the manufacturers' profit, and 50 per cent. for the advertisements which could not in any way benefit the purchaser? If the millions that were spent in advertising it, were devoted to producing a purer cocoa at a lower price, would not the people buy it?

Unfortunately, the answer to that reasonable question must be "No." Jacob saw that Harry's pure, cheap cocoa would be overlooked. No one would know of it. Harry would be ruined before his pure, cheap commodity was recognized. It was the system that was wrong. . . .

Jacob was not, then, sufficiently clear in his ideas to formulate a remedy for so large a wrong as "the system." Not then had the genius of such writers as H. G. Wells and Bernard Shaw put the problem before the tentative thinker in a persuasive, comprehensible, and fascinating literature. Socialism to Jacob Stahl in the autumn of 1896 was associated with the rant of the Hyde Park orator. He had read of Robert Owen, and thought him a dreamer whose dream had proved a fantasy. He had heard of Lassalle and Karl Marx, and regarded them as

revolutionists and anarchists. The name of the Fabian Society meant nothing to him; he had a vague idea that it represented a caucus of Liberal politicians. The bonds of an old, uninstructed contempt for all that represented change still held him in some particulars. In his thirty-three years of life he had broken such bonds, but so strong was the tradition which held him, that even now his thoughts still ran sometimes in the groove hollowed out for him by the dogmas of the country parson who had been his only tutor during the plastic years of growth. . . .

Jacob, meditating on advertising and the system, reverted to his own pronouncement made a few hours before. "I don't believe I've got any theories," he had said to Meredith. He had not. Introspection only confirmed the statement.

He had been a looker-on; his experience, bitter though it had been in some ways, had not been directive. He had been an observer of life, detached, condemning or appraising without a positive test. Was it not possible, he thought, to direct this knowledge he had gained by experience, to find in it some marked tendency, and so to develop it?

His only answer was that he had an open mind. He was eager still to learn. How could he pronounce a verdict on the whole when he had known so small a part?

Nevertheless, he could decide the minor point; he had gained from his experience enough knowledge for that. He could pronounce definitely against advertising as a profession for himself. It might be that he was too idealistic, or it might be that he lacked the sophistry, the bias of mind, necessary to persuade himself that he was serving any public interest by crying wares of whose qualities he knew nothing. He was in a pleasurably excited state of

mind. His thoughts flowed with a fascinating ease.

"I come back again and again," he thought, "to this determination to write. Is it that some unknown influence at once keeps that ideal before me and restrains me from execution before I am ripe to reach out towards it? Why, to-night I am mature. It may be that now I am at the turn of the road — that my experience is beginning to crystallize into ideas, into theories."

One theory he held and took to bed with him; his technique in writing had been a false one — for him. He was a realist; he had had experience; he would burn that parody of the artistic method he had attempted; he would write of the things he knew. . . .

6.

When Jacob received his notice from Price and Mallinson, some three weeks after that evening's conversation, his first thought was that here was the golden opportunity; his second that the eighty pounds or so that stood to his credit would not keep him for very long, especially if he remained at Torrington Square. To enter the world of letters he must make renunciation.

Meredith was still in London. Jacob had not seen him very often since that long discussion on the meaning and purpose of the writer's art, but they had met on four occasions altogether, and the friendship between them was growing. Meredith was one of those rare individuals in the world of letters who could tolerate criticism. The reason that they had not seen more of one another was that Meredith had many friends who were making an eager call upon his society now that he was in London after so long an absence.

He was staying in a boarding-house in Montague Place, in one of the houses that have now given place to the extension of the British Museum. Jacob had been there to dinner with him once, and had been interested in the strange mixture of persons he had met at the dinner-table. Afterwards he and Meredith had gone up to the latter's bedroom. "It's the only place where we can be quiet," Meredith had said. Jacob had wondered that a novelist should have evidenced, as Meredith had, such an entire lack of interest in the "queer people"— Jacob's phrase — downstairs.

"Oh! one doesn't write about people of that kind," Meredith had said, in answer to a question. Jacob had thought that they would make interesting material.

It was to this boarding-house that Jacob went on the evening of the day he received his notice. Meredith was out, but Jacob wrote a note entreating him to come round to Torrington Square; and he put in an appearance at ten o'clock, when Jacob had reluctantly given up the hope of seeing him that night.

There had never been any discussion between them of Jacob's prospects. The subject had been casually referred to, but always with the implicit assumption that Jacob would not throw up his well-paid job in order to pick up a very uncertain livelihood in the world of letters.

Jacob began as soon as he had settled Meredith into a chair and had provided him with whisky.

"I've got the sack," was his curt announcement.

"Heavens!" ejaculated Meredith. "Oh, I say, I *am* sorry. Why, for goodness sake?"

"I don't know that I am sorry," replied Jacob, "and as to why — well, I've seen it coming for a long time. The firm has simply got to cut expenses,

and I'm one of 'em. They were very decent about it — told me they had no fault to find with me personally. Samson's a good chap. He's my immediate principal, you know. He told me I could take what time off I liked, to look for another berth."

"I suppose you won't have much trouble?" suggested Meredith.

"Well, I don't know," returned Jacob. "I've been associated with two failures, and that has been my whole experience in the advertising world."

"Would that tell against you?"

"Probably — to a certain extent. But what I wanted to ask you, was whether this were not a golden opportunity to chuck a business I dislike, and try to write?"

"What are you going to live on?"

"I've got about eighty pounds."

"And then?"

Jacob shrugged his shoulders. "I hoped by the time that had gone I might be earning something by writing."

"It's the devil's own job to get literary work," said Meredith gravely.

"But you chucked your accountant's business," protested Jacob.

"Not till I had saved enough to bring in a couple of pounds a week," said Meredith. "I can live on that down in Cornwall, and then I'd got some steady work in the way of reviewing, too."

Jacob sighed. All these men who succeeded had worked with one definite object. There had been Owen Bradley, that infinitely patient, careful, persistent man who had forced his way to success. Now here was another example; Meredith had saved between two and three thousand pounds probably, had stinted himself, no doubt, lived cheaply, worked

overtime, all with a view to achieving his ambition. He had won for himself a measure of independence, and, in time, he would, without a doubt, succeed.

But this miserable creature Jacob Stahl — it was so he thought of himself — had never kept his ambition steadily before him. He had spent the capital of the patrimony which would have given him economic freedom, and in the past two years, when he might have saved two or three hundred pounds by careful living, he had indulged himself by remaining in expensive rooms, and had spent his income as he earned it. He had deliberately courted failure, not success, and he would doubtless achieve failure in full measure. He had been feckless, had wasted his time and his money; had concentrated on nothing, living for the day, consoling his conscience by calling his wastefulness — experience. Once again he was confronted by Cairns' criticism, "No grit," a criticism so amply confirmed by Cecil Baker. Yes, he was, indeed, a poor, miserable creature, and it was probably too late to make another beginning now. He had always been making new beginnings that led nowhere.

"You wouldn't advise me to try literature for a living, then?" he asked, a little desperately.

"Well, I don't say that exactly. I've never seen anything you've written, you know; but I should most certainly advise you, if you have no private income, to get another job, temporarily at all events, in the advertising business, so that you could feel your feet a bit before you went in for writing as a means of livelihood."

"I shall never write anything while I have to work in an office all day. It takes too much out of me."

"Yes, I know," sympathized Meredith. "It does.

We are alike in that. There are some men who *can* do it, though."

"I can't," admitted Jacob hopelessly.

"Of course, if I hear of anything in the way of reviewing or any job of that sort, I'll let you know," said Meredith. "But those jobs are few and far between, and the men on the spot get on to them at once. I'm so far out of the world down in Cornwall."

For a time they discussed the detail of the methods of literary beginners. It was not a heartening discussion for Jacob. The men who had succeeded had always had some recommendation; if they were not brilliant and inventive writers, they had had at least a University education, or some influence in Fleet Street, or had been endowed with qualities of energy and push which had told in the struggle. Jocob had, so far as he could see, no recommendations of any sort. He was not brilliant, not well educated, had no influence and no push. He was just a sample of the average aspirant who, with no particular qualifications, thinks he would like to earn a living by writing. There were thousands like Jacob Stahl, occupied now in various employments, who had tried literature and failed.

"You are quite right, old chap," was Jacob's last word on that subject. "I was a bit of an ass to think of it at all."

Meredith repeated his offer of help should opportunity occur, and then, after he had risen to go — it was nearly midnight — he said: "I've had a letter from the publishers. They've accepted my novel."

"By Jove, I *am* glad, old chap," said Jacob with real enthusiasm. There was no trace of jealousy or envy in his mind. "I *am* glad. But why in the name of all that's wonderful didn't you tell me before?"

Curious that just in this way had Bradley an-

nounced, years ago, that he had won the great Birchester Municipal Offices competition which had been the beginning of his success.

"It doesn't mean anything much, you know," said Meredith. "It's one thing to have a novel accepted and another to make either fame or money by it."

"Oh! You'll get both, old chap. I am dead sure of it," said Jacob.

"I shan't stay in London now," said Meredith. "I am going back to Cornwall this week."

"Oh, rotten!" exclaimed Jacob. "Lord knows when I shall see you again."

"Come and spend your holiday with me next year," suggested Meredith.

"Rather. That's an engagement. If I get a holiday, of course. One doesn't always, going into a new firm. . . ."

Meredith left London two days later, and Jacob saw him off from Paddington.

When he was left alone in the station, he felt depressed and miserable, and not a little lonely.

And he had to set about finding another job, a thing he hated above all others — Samson had promised him some introductions. He had lost faith in that kindly fate which he had thought was controlling his destiny, was educating him for a literary career, and would at last clearly point the golden road to success in letters. No, it wasn't fate that counted, it was one's own character. Bradley and Meredith did not trust to the help of any kindly fate. They commanded. . . .

CHAPTER XIX

ASPECTS OF DESTINY

1.

Jacob touched the depths of gloom during the weeks immediately before Christmas. Once more he was trying to play a losing game, and he was reverting to the same depression of mind, failure of energy, and lack of interest in life that he had experienced three years before.

His own prophecy had been justified; he was not finding it easy to obtain employment. He had been associated with two failures. It seemed that all the successful advertising men knew already that Price and Mallinson's venture was coming to grief. The failure in this case was not financial; the firm had reserves of capital; but from the business point of view the great campaign had proved to be ill-conducted, if not ill-planned. And it was with the conduct of the scheme that Jacob Stahl was associated.

A man with the necessary qualities might easily have overcome this handicap. Farmer had also been associated with the same firms, and Farmer walked straight into a berth and a salary of £10 a week. Jacob congratulated his colleague somewhat half-heartedly on this occasion. He attributed Farmer's success to influence. Farmer knew everyone in the world of advertising; moreover, he had that wonderful gift of bluff — quite another thing to "grit," of course.

Jacob went to every appointment he had obtained

through Samson's introductions, with an increasing certainty of failure. He had not, at the best of times, the manner which would impress the kind of men he had to interview; and as his depression deepened, his attempts at bluff grew ever less happy. In his attempt to season his brag with honesty, he produced the effect of being an inept liar. Furthermore, his own carelessness in matters of detail was telling against him. He had not kept specimens of the copy he had written or of the advertisements he had designed. A very few folders and booklets printed by Price and Mallinson's, and some odd sheets of typewritten copy were all the evidence of his quality that he was able to produce. Farmer had bound copies of neatly displayed "schemes," conceived and set out by himself, and three folio volumes of "specimens" which included every form of brilliant inducement that could be offered to the buyers of advertised commodities. It is true that not all of those specimens were the sole creation of Farmer's genius; but he had had some hand in their production, and probably did not find it necessary to point out the particular features which were exclusively his own handiwork.

A fortnight before Christmas, Jacob relinquished his futile efforts for a time. There were many reasons for so doing, chief among them the obvious one that the time was hopelessly unsuitable; no one was going to engage new men at that season. It was an excuse, but Jacob tried to content his conscience with the sophistry.

He had not been to see his brother, Doris and the paramount interest, since that notice to leave Price and Mallinson's. He was afraid of Eric's advice, and also of his criticism. Eric would not say "I told you so," but the claim to that triumphant

prophecy, in this case so clearly made, would be evidenced in the spirit if not the letter of his cold analysis of the situation. Nevertheless Jacob, at the ebb of his resource, thought that he would do well to brave criticism and advice. Christmas was a time of goodwill, and Eric might be able to point the way to some literary work which would fill in the time until that sought-for appointment should be obtained.

Christmas Day would be on a Friday, he would go and see them at the usual time on the preceding Sunday.

2.

There was a brougham and pair outside the Putney house when Jacob arrived, and he hesitated; he was not in a mood to meet any "grand" people, to sit and attempt conversation with people who would be sure to despise him, however politely their contempt was veiled. But on second thoughts he decided to go in. It was a long journey from Bloomsbury, even by the District Railway, and he craved for tea and companionship of some kind. Perhaps he might go straight up to the nursery.

This was the request he proffered when the maid answered his gentle ring at the bell. He had hoped that society in the drawing-room might not hear him, at least would not trouble their heads about him. He might find companionship with the little person who never criticized nor advised him; and, later, he would confide in Doris, and so he could break the news to Eric by degrees. There would be an interview in the library to be endured, of course, but even that would not be unbearable.

The maid's reply crushed every hope of consolation.

"I'm afraid not, sir," she said, "the special doctor from 'Arley Street's just come."

"Why? Who's ill?" asked Jacob.

"It's the baby, sir, merin . . . merin . . ."

"Meningitis?" asked Jacob.

"Yes, sir," replied the maid with pleased cheerfulness. "Merinchitis. He was took bad the day before yesterday, and the special doctor's just come. Merinchitis, Dr. Pardelow said it was. Would you like to see the master, sir?"

Eric was plainly in great distress of mind, less on account of the child than because Doris was taking the affair so badly. "If anything happens I shall take her away for six weeks," Eric said, "to Italy, or the South of France."

Jacob only stayed a few minutes, and made no reference to his own affairs. As he was leaving, Eric said, "How are you doing, now? Are you still at the same place?" And Jacob replied:

"Yes, oh yes,"—that was true, he was—and added quickly: "I say, you will let me know at once if he gets better, won't you—or worse, of course?"

Eric promised.

On Monday evening Jacob found a telegram awaiting him when he returned from the office:

"He died this morning—Eric."

"Rather brutal," said Jacob to himself. "I don't suppose he cares very much, really. But oh, my Lord! I *am* sorry for Doris. I must write to her."

Jacob was quite composed as he ate his supper. The thing did not seem to touch him very nearly. His brother's son had been a nice, clean, jolly little chap, and he had avoided a world of infinite pain and difficulty by leaving it before he was faced with the horrible necessity of thinking for himself; of exercising

initiative when his brain refused to obey the calls made upon it; of toiling from office to office to meet refusal and rebuff. . . .

Later in the evening, when Jacob sat down to write Doris, the tragedy presented itself in quite another light. It was not the baby one need lament; he was, undoubtedly, well out of it; but Doris had found a meaning in life and lost it again. She had lost her religion and her soul. . . .

He sat, pen in hand, but wrote nothing. What was the use of writing? Why send a conventional message to show that he was not lacking in politeness? And if one sent a more personal appeal, one was faced with the charge of pose, hypocrisy, sentimentality. Written language could not begin to express real feeling. From the best you obtained no more than an impression, and that only when the thing was expressed by tedious methods, which, on analysis, were obviously artificial. . . .

"Dear old Doris," he wrote, "I am crying, too," and then he hastily tore up the sheet of paper and burnt it.

His statement had not lacked sincerity, or truth — but he sent no letter to Doris.

3.

He finished with Price and Mallinson's on Christmas Eve. Samson told him that he might take the extra week and use the time in looking for another job. The firm had dismissed Glass and Pocklington; only Dickson remained now of the four original travellers — young Dickson, the amateur, had done rather well on the whole. There had been very little for Jacob to do during the past three weeks. He had been filling his time at the office by doing all sorts

of odd jobs; thus he ended very much as he had begun.

He was paid up to the end of the year on leaving, and when he said good-bye to Samson, Jacob took occasion to thank his chief for this and other acts of consideration.

"Oh! that's all right," said Samson. "Have you got any job in your eye?"

"I can't say I have," replied Jacob.

"You'll get one easily enough after Christmas. I can give you a good testimonial," said Samson.

Jacob left with a very friendly feeling for Samson. Samson was a good fellow, and had been very decent about the whole affair. He had bungled somehow in his campaign, but even that had not been entirely his own fault. Perhaps he had been too good-natured. If he had not kept on Blaise and one or two other subordinates at Pennyquick Court, matters might have righted themselves. Even now, Samson was hopeful as to the future of his plans. There must be a period of retrenchment and reform, but he had confidence in the commercial value of his ideas, and finally he would be regarded as a pioneer — possibly, he might even show a profit to the firm! He was as full of creative energy as ever. No check, no rebuff, no amount of opposition, could subdue Samson's exuberant energy and resource.

Jacob, reflecting on these admirable qualities of Samson's as he left the office, thought that if he, himself, had only some of the same stamina, the same powers of mental activity and endurance, resilience, fortitude, grit . . . or whatever it was,— there seemed to be no precise definition of it — he would probably by now have an assured place in the world. But he lacked these powers of resistance. They were inborn, some essential of the very fibre of the man.

It was certain that Jacob Stahl could never acquire them. . . .

He came back to his inevitable, introspective "Why?" Were such things as these preordained? If so, by whom and to what end? Surely there must be some purpose. . . .

It was a raw evening, with a slight fog. The roads were coated with a thin film of greasy mud, and the bus-horses slid and scuttered on the vast "butter-slide" of asphalt. Every here and there, a little crowd marked the spot where a horse had gone down and lay still — thankfully, one inferred — for a few moments before it was goaded to take up the nerve-wearing struggle again; or if the horse were young and nervous, affording better sport to London's horde of idlers, a larger crowd was entertained by the sight of a fearful, futile energy that scored through the filth, great scratches on the road surface — scratches that looked by contrast a dull white.

Jacob was not interested in these familiar calls upon his attention. He had too much pity for the horses to find any amusement in witnessing their discomfiture. But he was disinclined to return home as yet. There was some quality of fellowship in the brilliance of the shops and the crowd of people, some air of festivity, that neither fog, filth, nor damp had power to obliterate.

On Ludgate Hill his attention was held by the crowd of hawkers standing in the gutter. Here were failures in another social stratum, he thought — men who had suffered some kind of experience analogous to his own, who had failed in workshop, factory, or casual employment as he had failed, first in his profession, and later on in other forms of activity. Doubtless these hawkers had failed for reasons very similar to those which had brought about his own

present condition of hopelessness. They, too, had lacked powers of resistance, of determination. . . .

He regarded their faces with interest, trying to see if he could trace in those varied, but for the most part repulsive, countenances any general likeness to himself, any one typical representative feature or expression. As he walked up the line — saluted with entreaties, shrill, raucous, and husky, to buy such puzzles, toys, and household articles as, even in 1896, were purchasable for a penny or twopence — a blotched and bearded face struck Jacob with a sense of familiarity. He paused and stared, knitting his brows in an effort to recall some dim association that was called up.

The hawker returned his stare with effrontery. "If you have a penny to spare," he said, "I can offer you a really splendid investment."

"Good Lord!" ejaculated Jacob; "not Woodhouse?"

"Don't interfere with honest trade," returned Woodhouse. "If you don't want to buy, move on, there's a good chap."

"But, I say," said Jacob, "can't I help you in any way? I . . ."

Woodhouse held up a flat little tin mannikin. "Help? Rather," he said. "Buy a dozen of these; they're dirt cheap at the price."

"Can't the Vicar . . ." began Jacob, but Woodhouse cut him short with an unpleasant oath.

"You can help me by buying," he continued. "If you won't, you can go to hell, and take Barker with you."

"Won't you come and see me?" pleaded Jacob. He was thinking of Cecil Barker, wondering if he could not emulate him for once. But Woodhouse was past even the services of the greater protagonist.

The passers-by jostled Jacob, and forced him closer to Woodhouse and his little tray of foolish dolls.

"No, I won't," said Woodhouse, subduing his voice and looking furtively towards an approaching policeman. "Buy or go — God damn you!"

Jacob gave way. Three or four loiterers had stopped to listen, and the hawkers on either side of Woodhouse had been interested spectators from the first. "I am damned sorry," said Jacob. He put his hand in his pocket, hesitated another moment, and then produced a half-sovereign.

Woodhouse took it eagerly, grinned, and dropped out of the line into the roadway. He made off with the air of one who expects to be followed. The hawkers who had stood next to him cast one glance in his direction, and then assailed the millionaire philanthropist who was in such an admirably generous mood.

Jacob excused himself — the policeman was close by, now — and got away from their importunacies and from all that strident babble of gutter salesmanship.

So not all of these failures were drawn from a lower social stratum! Woodhouse had come down all the way, and Woodhouse was now hopeless, beyond the reach of help. Perhaps Woodhouse had once felt as Jacob Stahl now felt? Perhaps Jacob Stahl might one day be hawking penny toys on Ludgate Hill?

When he reached his comfortable rooms in Torrington Square he asked at once to see his landlady, and in a very panic gave notice that he would be leaving on the following Saturday week.

Retrenchment and reform were the subject of his thoughts, also, that night. He had eighty pounds still between him and the gutter of Ludgate Hill — a solid satisfaction which must not be too lightly diminished.

4.

Jacob had only one letter on Christmas Day. It was from Meredith in Cornwall. It was not a long letter, and contained no matter of particular interest. Meredith had said before he went back, that he would not pledge himself to write at any length. "It takes up too much time," he had explained, and Jacob had understood. There was, however, a postscript which contained a suggestion. "By the way," wrote Meredith, "I see that Joe Gresswell has accepted the *Daily Post* editorship, which has been vacant for the last few weeks. He is sure to spread himself a bit on the literary side of the paper. Go and see him, and ask for some reviewing. Tell him I sent you. I used to know him very well."

"I'll write to him," thought Jacob. "I hate trying to see people without an introduction." But then he reflected that in the business world, with which he had made some slight acquaintance during the past two years, it was a maxim that if you wanted to get a job you must see the boss, that writing letters was a mere waste of time.

"Oh! I'll go and see him," said Jacob to himself, impatient with that mentor of his who was continually urging him to do the things he most disliked. He often had long arguments with that mentor, and sometimes tried to analyse the curious duality in himself which made it possible for him to be at once the commander and the commanded. He had noted that whenever he disobeyed the command of his conscience, or common sense, or whatever it was, he always had an unpleasant feeling of having shirked.

On this point of going to see Mr. Gresswell he acceded chiefly in order to be at peace with his mentor. He had troubles enough without inward strife. But,

as a matter of fact, he did not spend a miserable Christmas. He had his books, and on Boxing Day he had an inspiration for a little sketch, hardly worthy the name of a short story — a little imaginative study of personality evoked by the sight of a tramp passing his window. It was not more than eight or nine hundred words when it was finished. On Sunday he rewrote and greatly improved it. He was pleased with it, and had a feeling of satisfaction in having written it. Possibly the editor of the *Daily Post* might find a use for it. There would be no harm in taking it with him the next day. He set himself to make a fair and legible copy.

He knew that the editors of the morning daily papers were seldom to be found at the office before late in the afternoon, so he arrived in Fleet Street at four o'clock.

That unknown influence which Jacob sometimes thought of as a kindly fate, and at other times as a brutal destiny, had been cruelly unkind to him lately, but it had changed its mood on Christmas Eve, although Jacob was hardly yet conscious of the change.

It is the little things that decide destiny, or it appears so. Missing a man in the street may mean the difference between success or failure. On this occasion, if Jacob had been "out of luck," he might have gone to the offices of the *Daily Post* at five o'clock, and missed his opportunity. Impossible to say why he chose the earlier hour — he did not know himself — but it is quite certain that if he had not gone at that particular time he would have missed his chance.

He sent up his message to the editor by a small boy in livery, who misunderstood the purport of it, and wrote the name of the introducer instead of the

introduced, on the slip which was handed into the *sanctum sanctorum.*

Gresswell jumped to his feet as Jacob entered, and then looked surprised. "I understood that Mr. Meredith . . ." he said, and paused.

"Oh no; I'm sorry," said Jacob. "I told the boy. Meredith's down in Cornwall. He only told me to mention his name."

"I see — I see," said Gresswell. "You're a friend of his. Do sit down. How is Meredith? I haven't seen him for ages."

Gresswell had time to spare at that moment; there was nothing doing.

Jacob found it quite easy to answer questions about Meredith, and told Gresswell about the novel which was to appear in a couple of months' time. They talked for quite ten minutes before Gresswell said:

"And what did you want to see me about? Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Meredith thought you might be able to give me some reviewing," said Jacob. He had an insanely honest inclination to add that he had no experience and could not write, but he thought of Farmer, and checked the impulse.

"Well, there are very few books in just now," said Gresswell, getting up and going over to a side-table. "I am my own literary editor at present," he went on, picking up three or four volumes and glancing at the title-pages, "and I hope to be able to keep an eye on that side of the paper."

"Yes, so I understand," said Jacob. He did not want to drag Meredith's name in again; he had talked nothing but Meredith ever since he had been in the room.

"What's your subject?" asked Gresswell. He seemed to take it for granted that a man who came on

Meredith's introduction would be capable and experienced.

Again Jacob checked a foolish impulse to avow that he knew nothing about anything. "I am afraid I can't claim to be a specialist on any subject but architecture," he said, "but I should be glad to do any general literature you cared to give me."

"These ought to be worth a notice," remarked Gresswell. "They've been in the office for a couple of weeks." He had separated three volumes, and now handed them to Jacob. "You might write to me in a couple of weeks' time. Keep your eye on the list of 'Books Received,' and write for anything you would particularly like."

"Oh, thanks very much!" said Jacob. He was trying hard to appear as if this were the kind of thing he was used to.

"Let me see, have I your name?" asked Gresswell.

Jacob gave it to him, and he made a note of it in his diary.

A boy brought in a slip of paper as Gresswell was writing, and handed it to him.

"Say I'll see him in one moment," said Gresswell to the boy.

Jacob understood that his time was up. He was relieved. He wanted to be away, to hug himself in secret joy over his extraordinary success.

"I mustn't keep you any longer," he said; and then, remembering the sketch he had with him, he added: "I don't know whether this would be any good to you. It's a little sketch of eight hundred words or so appropriate to Christmas."

Gresswell held out his hand for the manuscript, glanced at the opening, and then said: "Oh, thank you! Yes, we want some stuff of this kind. I shall probably be able to use it this week. Good-bye."

He shook hands warmly with the intoxicated Jacob. "How easy it was!" he reflected when he was seated in a tea-shop, gloating over the three books he had brought away with him. There had been no necessity for a statement of his qualifications, no request for a specimen of his work, no horrible inquiries of any sort. Some men of quite respectable literary attainment had to wander from door to door, trying to get work, and here he, Jacob Stahl, the unknown, the inexperienced, the failure, had simply walked in with a verbal introduction and had swept all before him!

Jacob Stahl did not know that the name of the man who had succeeded him in the editor's room, was one that was quite well known in the world of letters, nor that Gresswell said to his applicant, who had come five minutes too late, "I'm sorry; I'm afraid I can't. I had room for another reviewer, but I've just put a new man on. He was with me when your name was brought in. I must give him his chance now. Look me up again in a month or two."

Gresswell was a man who kept his word. And, as luck would have it, he liked the matter and manner of the sketch Jacob had submitted to him. It appeared in the paper on the following Wednesday.

When Jacob saw it in print, his cup was full of happiness. He had found plenty to interest him and to write about in the three books he had brought from the *Daily Post* office.

But even in the mood of elation which had so rapidly succeeded his late despair, he maintained his sensible resolution to leave the luxury of Torrington Square.

A brilliant idea occurred to him. Why should he not go to Meredith's boarding-house in Montague Place? There were some amusing people there, and

he would surely find some place to write. At the worst, he could always write in the British Museum Reading Room.

Fate was very busy with Jacob Stahl that Christmas. . . .

BOOK FOUR

CLIMAX

BOOK FOUR

CLIMAX

CHAPTER XX

BETTY

1.

Jacob approached the Montague Place boarding-house with a determination to make terms. He did not know how much Meredith had paid, but he had mentally fixed his own limit of expenditure at twenty-five shillings a week for board and lodging. Another five shillings, he thought, would cover casual expenses; and he could, therefore, look forward to at least a year's freedom from financial worry. In a year, surely he would have achieved something. There was, even at the outset, the splendid promise of this work for the *Daily Post*.

He had not been greatly attracted by the personality of the proprietress of the boarding-house on the occasion of his visit to Meredith. He had thought her "fussy," and this impression was confirmed by his interview with her on the Wednesday morning after Christmas.

Mrs. Parmenter was a widow of uncertain age, with very black hair parted in the middle of her forehead. Jacob did not for some time recognize that this front hair was a toupé — so much of the remainder was hidden by a lace cap.

She remembered her visitor, and, ignoring his im-

mediate question as to terms, wandered off into eulogy of his friend Meredith.

"It is such a real pleasure to me," she meandered on, "to have anyone literary in the house. Of course, in my position, one *can't* pick and choose. One *must* take almost anyone; but I *do* draw the line at coloured gentlemen, even Indians, though I believe some of them are nice enough. . . ."

Jacob listened politely, uncertain whether she were going to ask him for references or — her manner was certainly cordial — welcome him with open arms. At the first opportunity he intimated that he, too, had literary ambitions.

"So I understood from Mr. Meredith," replied Mrs. Parmenter, "and you might like to have his room. It *is* vacant at the moment, though I've had one inquiry from a German gentleman, who said he would call again this afternoon. Perhaps you would like to look at it again, even though you have seen it already. We were all so disappointed that you and Mr. Meredith didn't give us a little more of your company that evening. . . ."

"Oh, it doesn't matter about seeing it!" said Jacob. "But about terms — you see, I can't afford . . ."

"Would you require full board?" asked Mrs. Parmenter.

"What does that mean, exactly?" questioned Jacob.

"Would you be in to lunch and tea?"

"Oh yes, I expect so — most days."

Mrs. Parmenter knitted her already well-creased forehead. "I've been getting thirty-two shillings a week for that room," she said, "but with full board it would be more, of course. Still, I might say thirty-five shillings. It isn't really so much a question of

profit with me, but I *do* like to have nice people in the house."

"You haven't a smaller room, I suppose?" asked Jacob, fighting his inclination to take Meredith's room at the terms offered. He thought of Woodhouse as an antidote to the spirits of vanity and indolence which prompted him to close the bargain.

"We-ll," said Mrs. Parmenter, making a long-drawn confidence of the word — "well, I have, but I don't know that you would like it; it's over the bath-room; on the second floor." She looked at Jacob with her mouth screwed into a questioning pout. He understood that this room marked the limit of poverty among the boarders in Montague Place.

"Might I see it?" he asked. It seemed superfluous to ask for terms in connection with this box-room.

Mrs. Parmenter said he might, but she shook her head over it; and when they reached the second floor and the room was displayed, she stood at the door and sighed apologetically for its smallness.

"It certainly is small," said Jacob.

The looking-glass stood under the window on a chest of drawers, which touched the bed upon one side and the wall on the other. In front of it on the wall side, was an enamelled-iron tripod that held a diminutive basin and ewer; and it was quite obvious that this tripod must be moved before the drawers could be pulled out. There was a wardrobe behind the door — which could not be opened beyond a right angle — and the tiny fireplace (the grate was filled with lumps of asbestos that looked very like potatoes) occupied nearly the whole wall-space between wardrobe and washstand.

"I don't quite know where I should be able to write," commented Jacob.

"I have a little table," said Mrs. Parmenter, "but

I don't know where you could put it. But you could use the dining-room in the mornings after half-past ten; there's hardly ever anyone there."

Hardly an ideal place for study, thought Jacob, and the idea of a dining-room in which he would be subject to constant interruptions appealed to him little more. Should he take Meredith's room? He steeled himself to the contemplation of his urgent need for economy.

"I was wondering," he said. "I always have a cold bath in the morning, and I might wash in the bathroom, perhaps; and then that"— he indicated the tripod —"could be taken away, and the chest of drawers put flat against the wall, and then don't you think there might be room for a little table under the window?"

"A young Russian gentleman slept here for some time," said Mrs. Parmenter, by way of reply, "but he was out all day, and very often at night, too."

"Don't you think that could be done?" persisted Jacob.

"Ye-es," replied Mrs. Parmenter reflectively — "ye-es. Certainly, that might be done."

"Only," went on Jacob, "I have a heap of books. I don't know where I could put those."

"There's a large bookcase with a lock-up front in the dining-room," suggested Mrs. Parmenter. "Perhaps you noticed it. It's nearly empty at present."

"Oh! Wouldn't you mind my books going there?" asked Jacob.

"I should be glad to have them," replied Mrs. Parmenter.

"And there's a gas-fire here, I see," said Jacob, beginning to see the brighter side.

"That would be an extra, of course," said Mrs. Parmenter.

"Yes; you haven't told me yet, by the way, how much you want for this room."

After another effort of forehead-wrinkling, Mrs. Parmenter thought twenty-six shillings a fair price; for the use of the gas-fire she would have to charge another three shillings.

"Oh, well, I may not want to use the fire," said Jacob; and so the bargain was settled.

Mrs. Parmenter murmured something about having to tell her partner, but Jacob understood that the partner was not a difficult person to appease in this connection. He had not seen the partner — had never heard before that she existed. He wondered if she were a hypothetical person, used as a means of defence against protesting boarders. He saw that such a person might have her uses.

He did not like Mrs. Parmenter any better after this interview — she detained him for some time afterwards in the drawing-room with stories of her earlier life, passed in more genteel occupations. But as he walked back to Torrington Square he was full of high resolve, and hugged the thought of the privations in room-space he was planning as an act of courageous martyrdom. This was true economy, and he congratulated himself on having withstood the temptation of the larger room. Had he not, practically, fulfilled his ambition of getting board and lodging for twenty-five shillings a week? He was quite determined that he would not use the gas-fire. . . .

Nevertheless, when he woke to his new surroundings on Sunday morning, he felt more than a little depressed by his outlook. He regretted the spaciousness of his old rooms.

"It's all very well," said Jacob to himself, regarding the accommodation of his bedroom, "to talk of genius in a garret, but I'm not a genius, and condi-

tions do make a lot of difference to me. I know I shan't be able to write as well here as I could have done in Torrington Square. I'm not sure I wasn't a fool to leave. I might have made enough to keep the place on. . . . And isn't it beastly cold up here?" He looked at the gas-fire. "Oh, well, I'll let myself down easily, anyway," he thought. "It's no use pretending that I'm going to write up here all day in the cold; I'm jolly well not."

He got out of bed and lit the fire at once.

2.

The real trouble with Jacob at the moment was that he had no set work to do. He had dealt — efficiently, he thought — with the books that he had received from the editor of the *Daily Post*. One had been a collection of literary anecdotes, from which he had quoted, albeit with a harassing doubt at the back of his mind as to whether the anecdotes were new to the reading public. Another book had dealt with the Æsthetic Theory, and he had discovered, a little to his own astonishment, that he had a theory of his own concerning the Sense of Beauty — a theory which did not agree with that of his author. He had spent a couple of afternoons in the British Museum, looking up other authorities, had found sufficient warrant for his own attitude, and had written an article of some six hundred words to uphold his own theory of Art. The third book he had considered negligible, and had dismissed in a few lines. When he had seen these articles in proof, he had been rather proud of them.

He had ordered the *Daily Post* to be sent to him every day by a news-agent. That sixpence a week was a very necessary item of expenditure, for he had

been quick enough to see that it was essential for him to understand the policy and general attitude of the paper to which he contributed.

But now that these reviews were done, he was faced with the problem of making work for himself. The publishing season was at its dullest. The list of "Books Received" contained nothing but pamphlets, reprints, and other matter which from his point of view was quite worthless. Moreover, Mr. Gresswell had said, "Write to me in a fortnight." That was a direction which it would be well to take literally. Editors must not be worried without reason.

Jacob thought of his novel, and spent his first morning in Montague Place re-reading the original and the revised versions. Both disgusted him. There was some quality of staleness about the thing which seemed to prohibit any reasonable hope of improvement. He thought the book showed promise. He was glad that he had written it, and so come to understand some of the chief difficulties which the task of novel-writing presented. But — he shrugged his shoulders — it was 'prentice work. The gong had sounded for midday Sunday dinner, but so intent was he on going forward that he stayed to tear up at once these trial endeavours. He felt a glow of achievement as he destroyed.

There was no place in which to stow the litter he had made of his literary past. He made a note of the fact that he must buy a waste-paper basket.

"One must write and re-write," he said to himself, as he went down to dinner, "it is the only way."

At the head of the narrow, dark flight of stairs that led to the unimagined gloom of the basement-kitchen and offices, Jacob saw a young woman setting down on the wooden flap table, just outside the dining-room door, the joint of roast beef which doubtless

was to constitute the second course of the dinner. She had her back to him as he turned into the narrow passage which led to the back room, the scene of every meal except afternoon tea. But before he reached her she had set down the dish and turned to descend the basement stairs. She paused and looked at Jacob for a moment with a frank curiosity.

She was wearing a large white apron which enveloped her up to the chin, and her sleeves were tucked up to her elbows.

Jacob, in that one brief glance, saw that the young woman had a firm, well-moulded figure, fair hair, and clear, steady blue eyes. He thought her a very attractive young woman, much too nice for a cook.

Mrs. Parmenter bored him at dinner by talking to him about literature, or what she imagined to be literature. She made vague references to authors, and gave utterance to such literary criticisms as, "I'm so devoted to Carlyle," or "No doubt it's bad taste, but I *do* prefer Dickens to Thackeray."

Jacob assented to her statements of opinion without comment. He was self-conscious in the presence of so many people. Opposite to him were a stout, high-coloured woman of sixty or so, who was given to interpolating facetious remarks, and a youngish man with a black beard, who wiped his moustache every time before he spoke and appeared anxious to be thought intelligent. These two people had evidently been informed by Mrs. Parmenter that Mr. Stahl was a "literary gentleman," and each was intent in his or her own manner to display erudition. They dragged in the titles of well-known books with no ostensible purpose save to show that they were acquainted with the great authors.

Jacob though it a dull game, and was conscious of no desire to exhibit his own learning. The stout

woman shook an elaborately coiffured head at him, and said he was "too modest."

In the peaceful intervals during which the boarders were too interested in food to waste time in speech, Jacob was constructing a story of a literary man who married a woman of the lower classes. It was not a realistic story, for the woman, if she had a marked talent for household management, had none of the disadvantages usually associated with lack of education. Indeed, she exhibited a highly intelligent and sympathetic interest in her husband's writing. Jacob acknowledged to himself that the story had a flaw in it somewhere, but he curiously disliked the simple task of raising his female protagonist in the social scale. That seemed to him to rob the story of its peculiar interest. . . .

He glanced down at the basement stairs as he left the dining-room, but the cook was nowhere to be seen.

Jacob went to Lee-Perry's to tea and stayed to supper. Lee-Perry was interested to hear of Jacob's literary ambitions, and they talked a good deal of Meredith.

Before he went to bed Jacob sat over his gas-fire and tried once more to make a credible story of his dinner-table imaginings. "Of course, a woman of that class would be impossible," he reflected, and yet, when he tried to substitute a governess, the story at once became lifeless and commonplace.

3.

He was very resolute on Monday morning, but resolution and inspiration are gifts of different spirits. He joined the first breakfast at eight o'clock — he was never tempted to lie in bed in the morning,

slovenliness and uncleanliness he hated — but when he went upstairs immediately afterwards he found that his room had not been "done." He could not go back to the dining-room, there was another breakfast at nine o'clock. The drawing-room fire had not been lighted, and it was too early for the British Museum; besides, he wanted to smoke.

"These things are a handicap," reflected Jacob, standing at the door of his disordered room. He went in and stood by his little table under the window. Outside, a fine drizzle was falling, and Montague Place was a dreary expanse of greasy grey pavement.

"These things do not inspire me to write," said Jacob to himself. He wondered whether it would not be possible for him to go and live in the country. He might join Meredith in Cornwall; at least live somewhere near him. Mr. Gresswell would probably have no objection to sending books down there for review. There would be no British Museum at hand for reference, but there would be Meredith. Jacob had wonderful confidence in Meredith's scholarship. . . .

It was a brilliant idea! Why had he not thought of it before? He could write to Mr. Gresswell at the end of the week — the fortnight would have elapsed then — reminding him of his promise, and asking if it would make any difference if his reviewer lived in Cornwall. And, meanwhile, now that he was boiling over with enthusiasm, he would write to Meredith.

He found paper and envelopes in his partly unpacked portmanteau, and wrote the letter at once.

When that was done he went to the Museum.

He took a supply of foolscap with him, but when he had found a seat and made himself comfortable, he realized that he still had nothing to write about. He wanted to do another sketch on the lines of the

one that Mr. Gresswell had accepted and printed, but no idea for treatment presented itself.

He found himself thinking of the boarding-house cook, and in disgust with himself and the idleness of his imagination, he fetched a volume of the "Encyclopædia Britannica," and began to read.

Presently he came across a reference to Chartism, and remembered that he had seen some allusion to the Chartists in a *Daily Post* leader a few days before, but who or what Chartists were, he had no conception. Vaguely they were connected in his mind with Charles Kingsley, but why, he did not know. It seemed to him that the day might well be devoted to filling some of the blank spaces of his mind in this connection.

The Museum reading-room is a glorious treasure-house for the student. Jacob was soon immersed. He quickly mastered the chief facts of the Chartist agitation, and his imagination became intrigued by the personality of Feargus O'Connor. Why should not one do a little article on that "most injured man," as the funeral oration of William Jones described him? It might be one of a series on, say, "Forgotten Politicians." It would be easy to find others. There was James Bronterre O'Brien, for instance, and Francis Place. . . .

When Jacob returned to tea at the boarding-house — he had overlooked the necessity for lunch — he had his article on O'Connor well in hand. Before dinner it was finished.

He felt at ease with his conscience again. He had been working.

At dinner he favoured the young bearded man with a sketch of the franchise movement in England between the years 1832 and 1884.

The bearded man wiped his moustache and said:

"We shan't hear much more of Reform now we've got a Conservative Government in power."

Jacob replied that he was interested in the question from a historical rather than a political point of view.

The conversation declined after that pronouncement, but Jacob felt that he had maintained his reputation as a literary man. He stayed in the drawing-room after dinner and read Kingsley's "Alton Locke," which he had found among Mrs. Parmenter's books.

4.

He did not see the "cook" again until Wednesday. He had very firmly and deliberately put her out of his mind, and it was a shock to him when he came in to tea, to find her in a hat and coat sitting with Mrs. Parmenter on the drawing-room sofa.

He was very late — it was nearly half-past five — and he thought he had unwittingly interrupted a domestic conference. He apologized for his intrusion and turned to leave the room.

"Oh, come in, Mr. Stahl," said Mrs. Parmenter. "This is my partner, Miss Gale."

Jacob blushed. "I believe I have seen you once before," he said.

"Oh, cooking!" replied Miss Gale. "I'll get you some more tea," and, disregarding Jacob's asseveration that he did not want any tea, she picked up the teapot and left the room.

"Such a nice girl!" said Mrs. Parmenter. "Her father's a clergyman, and she's one of a big family. She's only been here with me a few months, but it's really wonderful what a lot of work she does."

"Does she never — er — appear?" asked Jacob, with one eye on the door.

"No, hardly ever," said Mrs. Parmenter. "As she says, that's *my* department. And really at times a very trying one. If one could only pick and choose — it's so pleasant when we can get a literary man like yourself, Mr. Stahl — it would be all plain sailing, no doubt, but . . ."

Mrs. Parmenter, never at a loss for small talk, was fairly launched on the engrossing subject of the difficult temper of boarders. The constant allusions to Jacob's own entirely satisfactory temperament were flattering, no doubt, but Jacob, watching the door, was thinking what a life Miss Gale must lead in that subterranean kitchen, spending her young life in cooking meals for all these dreadful boarders. When Mrs. Parmenter paused for the *mot juste* to describe the perfidies of some departed "guest," he interpolated with great inappropriateness:

"Does she do *all* the cooking?"

"Oh, she *loves* doing it," replied Mrs. Parmenter with remarkable apprehension of the context in Jacob's mind. "But, as I was saying, nothing seemed good enough for Miss Heathcote, she . . ."

The door opened, but not to admit Miss Gale. Jacob's freshly-made tea was brought by the tired-looking parlour-maid.

"It is very good of you," said Jacob, "to have had fresh tea made; I hope I did not drive Miss Gale away."

"Dear me, no," replied Mrs. Parmenter. "She was just going when you came in."

Jacob endured the full story of Miss Heathcote's misdoings while he had tea, but was not rewarded with any further description of Miss Gale's share in the household work of Montague Place.

He escaped as soon as he could. He had completed two sketches of "Forgotten Politicians," and

intended to write to Mr. Gresswell that evening. Before he left the drawing-room he proffered a request that he had had in his mind for the past three days, but had not the courage to put into words.

"Oh, by the way," he said, "I wonder if it would be a great bother to you, if I could have my room done a little earlier in the morning. I shan't be going to the Museum to-morrow, and . . ." He trailed off into a mumble about his room being the only place in which he could write.

"Of course, certainly," said Mrs. Parmenter. "It's such a little room, isn't it? I'll mention it to Miss Gale."

Was that another of Miss Gale's duties? wondered Jacob when he was upstairs. Surely she did not "do" the bedrooms herself? A sudden wave of disgust spread over him. "That old Parmenter woman," he thought, "does simply nothing, I suppose, except jabber. Idiotic old fool."

He felt that the ill-treated Miss Gale needed a champion. His feeling was purely altruistic. He hated to see good-natured people being oppressed by such creatures as the Parmenter woman. Miss Gale looked the sort of cheerful, unselfish person who would accept the lion's share of hard work, and never expect even to be thanked for doing it. It was impossible that she could "love" cooking in that vault downstairs, as Mrs. Parmenter had stated — quite impossible. . . .

When he read through his little study of J. B. O'Brien, Jacob found weaknesses in construction, and so postponed writing his letter to Gresswell until the next day.

5.

After dinner that evening Mrs. Blakey, the stout, highly-coloured woman with the weakness for facetious comment, lamented that it was impossible to make up a four for whist. "Now Mrs. James has gone, and Miss Gale never comes up after dinner," said Mrs. Blakey, "there seems no hope." She glanced at Jacob.

He was still reading "Alton Locke," but Mrs. Blakey's remark roused him to a sense of his surroundings. He was quite a competent whist-player, and if by making up a four he could rescue Miss Gale from her imprisonment for an hour or two, he saw that it was clearly his duty to volunteer; though he had no particular liking for the facetious Mrs. Blakey. He had a suspicion that she had been poking fun at him on one or two occasions.

"I will play if you can make a four," he said.

"There!" remarked Mrs. Blakey; "I was sure you had social talents. Now, Mrs. Parmenter, couldn't you induce that nice Miss Gale to materialize for once?"

Mrs. Parmenter raised her eyebrows and stretched her neck — she looked rather like an elderly chicken trying to swallow, Jacob thought. "Well," she said, "I can but see, but she gets so tired at the end of the day that she often goes to bed very soon after dinner."

"Come, now," said Mrs. Blakey; "it'll do her good to come upstairs. We're all beginning to wonder whether she hasn't taken a dislike to us. I'm sure Mr. Franklin's quite upset about it." Mr. Franklin was the bearded young man. It appeared that he was immediately eager to play whist.

Jacob had never liked him, but as he noticed the

self-conscious way in which Mr. Franklin now brushed his moustache away from his mouth, he thought him a peculiarly objectionable young man.

"Well, I can but see," repeated Mrs. Parmenter, and left the room.

"It seems rather hard lines to drag Miss Gale up here to play whist, after a hard day's work," remarked Jacob.

"Not at all; do her good," replied Mrs. Blakey; and Jacob was confirmed in his estimate of her as a selfish old woman. He was most sincerely sorry for Miss Gale.

Mrs. Parmenter presently returned to announce that Miss Gale was coming when she had changed her blouse; and a few minutes later — Jacob returned to his book in the interim — Miss Gale appeared, a little flushed — one inferred that the flush had been caused by the kitchen fire.

"Oh! this room is hot," she said in a low voice as she sat down to the whist-table; she put her hands to her cheeks.

"Hotter than your kitchen?" asked Mrs. Blakey.

Miss Gale shook her head. "Shall we cut for partners?" she remarked.

Jacob cut with Mrs. Blakey, and he noted that that lady looked quietly jubilant. He wondered if Miss Gale's whist was not up to the older lady's standard.

"We play short whist with honours for threepenny points, partner," announced Mrs. Blakey. "Do you play the call for trumps?"

Jacob said he did.

It soon became evident that Miss Gale and Mr. Franklin were outclassed. Miss Gale had a weakness for reserving her trumps, no matter how many she held. She admitted that she hated to lead them. In

a very short time Jacob and Mrs. Blakey had won two rubbers.

"Oughtn't we to cut in again?" asked Jacob, at the conclusion of the second.

"I'm quite satisfied if everyone else is," replied Mrs. Blakey.

Jacob thought her a greedy old creature, but he could not, in all modesty, say that it was not fair for the two best players to play together all the evening; so, little as he liked Mrs. Blakey, he was forced to pay her a compliment.

"I only meant that it was hardly fair to the others that I should have the best player as a partner all the time," he remarked.

"There's a polite young man," said Mrs. Blakey, who preferred winning at whist to receiving a compliment which she believed to be sufficiently obvious.

"Oh! Let's go on as we are," put in Miss Gale, and so it was settled.

At the end of the evening Jacob was disgusted to find that he had won five shillings. "Please don't pay me now," he pleaded, but Miss Gale insisted on an immediate settlement, and woke up her partner to supply the money.

Jacob thought Mrs. Parmenter looked distinctly ill-tempered, although it was clearly stated that the five shillings was only to be a loan, and again he pleaded for a postponement.

Mrs. Blakey, who was mixing her usual "night-cap"— a stiff glass of whisky-and-water — remarked: "No doubt Mr. Stahl had more money already than he knew what to do with."

Jacob mentally registered a vow of revenge.

He had opportunity to put it into effect the next evening. Mrs. Blakey's eagerness for whist was not to be countered. She was the "prize boarder"; she

had the best bedroom, and paid more than anyone else in the house. It was better from Mrs. Parmenter's point of view to lose small sums of money to her — that five shillings had been a very exceptional item — than to lose her patronage. It was plainly a rule of the establishment that Mrs. Blakey was to be petted and pampered. So when Miss Gale was once more dragged from her kitchen, and Mrs. Blakey said with determination, "Come, now; Mr. Stahl and I will give you your revenge," it was evidently policy to accept the suggestion without comment.

Jacob smiled and looked at Miss Gale, but she was already shuffling the cards, and did not appear conscious of his existence. She had been very quiet on the previous evening. Jacob wondered whether she was not tired out at the end of the day.

From the outset of the game Jacob assumed an air of distraction.

"Come, partner, where are your wits to-night?" Mrs. Blakey asked more than once. And Jacob replied, "Oh, I'm sorry," with an excellent semblance of regret. He was waiting to play his coup.

It was a subtle revoke that he made, and he nearly defeated his own end by planning it too carefully, for neither Mr. Franklin nor his partner observed that the revoke had been made.

Jacob did not dare to look at Mrs. Blakey; he saw that his error would be passed by, and it really cost him an effort to throw down his cards and say: "O Lord! I say, I *am* sorry. I'm afraid I've revoked."

Mrs. Blakey clicked her tongue. "God bless me! They'd never have seen it. Why didn't you keep your mouth shut?" she asked.

Jacob shrugged his shoulders. "It wouldn't have been fair," he remonstrated.

The point was argued at length, and Jacob appealed to Mrs. Parmenter, who protested that she had "no head for cards." Miss Gale tried desperately to settle the dispute by urging that the hand should not count.

"Of course it counts," insisted Jacob, "and I pay both sides."

Mrs. Blakey raised no objection to that solution of the trouble, and after an interval the game was continued.

At the end of the evening, Mr. Franklin and his partner had won back two-thirds of their last night's losings.

Mrs. Blakey, sipping her grog, remarked that she was afraid Mr. Stahl must be in love, but Jacob only laughed; that shaft did not wound him. He was rather pleased with himself. He had returned some of those ill-gotten gains — it was so he thought of them — to Miss Gale, who, no doubt, could not afford to lose five shillings.

She had not left the room to-night immediately on the completion of the game. She was at the other end of the drawing-room now, talking to Mr. Franklin. Jacob looked in her direction. "I don't know that one would call her pretty, exactly," he thought; "but it's a very lovable face." He was contrasting her temperament — as he inferred it — with that of the woman who had been his wife. "That," thought Jacob, glancing again at Miss Gale, "is the woman I ought to have married." And then: "What's she talking to that infernal Franklin for? Surely . . ."

As he was going upstairs he heard the drawing-room door open, and paused to see who was coming out. It was Miss Gale. She looked up at him, and he came down the hall again.

"Did you want to speak to me?" he asked.

"Yes. I—" she hesitated. "Did you revoke on purpose?"

"Of course not," replied Jacob; but his denial was not convincing. His smile suggested joy in Mrs. Blakey's discomfiture.

"Oh! But you shouldn't have done that," remonstrated Miss Gale.

"She's such a selfish old cat," explained Jacob.

Miss Gale gave no indication of being amused. "She's a very good boarder," she said; "the best we've got."

"She's quite conscious of that fact," was Jacob's answer.

"But you won't do anything to offend her?"

"I? Oh, I'm no one."

"Please, be nice to Mrs. Blakey, anyway," replied Miss Gale. "Good-night." She turned away quickly and ran down the basement stairs.

"Does she sleep down there, too?" wondered Jacob. "In that beastly underground place?"

The drawing-room door opened again before Jacob had reached the landing, and Mrs. Parmenter came out. Jacob heard her calling "Betty," and then Miss Gale's voice replying. He did not wait to hear what she said.

Jacob, meditating over his gas-fire, decided that he was dreadfully sorry for Miss Gale. He wished that it was in his power to give her a good time. And then he remembered that he had once had the same wish with regard to his typist, Miss Forrest. That comparison made him ashamed. Miss Forrest was a different type of human being altogether. He could never have any feeling but one of perfect respect for Miss Gale. It was horrible to have thought of her, even by accident, as in any way comparable to Miss Forrest. He rather wished, for instance,

that he were Miss Gale's father, or her elder brother, so that she might keep house for him. His last thought was that he thanked goodness he had never given Miss Forrest the least encouragement. Exactly why, he was grateful to remember that in this connection, he was not precisely sure.

6.

He had a letter from Cornwall on Friday morning. Meredith explained that he had not answered at once, because he had been looking round for a possible cottage for Jacob. He himself had only two rooms and a kitchen, and could not ask anyone to stay with him for more than a few days at a time; but he had found a small house half a mile away in which Jacob could have a sitting-room and a bedroom for eight shillings a week. The people, Meredith thought, seemed fairly clean for Cornwall. Anyway, if Jacob cared to come down and prospect on his own account, Meredith would be delighted to put him up until something could be found.

It was a very friendly letter, and Jacob, who had postponed writing to Mr. Gresswell until he had heard from Meredith, at once sent off his articles on "Forgotten Politicians," and with them a request for two or three books he had noted among recent publications. At the end of his letter he added a question as to whether he might still hope to have books sent to him for review if he decided to live in Cornwall.

He pottered about his room for an hour, doing nothing in particular. He was surprised that he was not more elated at the thought of going to join Meredith, and attributed his lack of enthusiasm to the weather. It was certainly a beastly day. Then he

reproached himself for idleness, and decided to go to the Museum.

As he was putting on his overcoat in the hall, Miss Gale came up from the basement in a hat and a big, heavy cloak. She, too, was evidently prepared to face the sleet and wind.

"Are you going out in this awful weather?" asked Jacob.

"I'm going shopping," replied Miss Gale, and exhibited a frail: "Are you going to the Museum?"

Jacob hesitated. "I was going to post a letter," he said.

"Let me take it," said Miss Gale.

"Oh, I want a little air," replied Jacob. "Which way do you go?"

"Tottenham Court Road," she said, and paused; then added: "But you can't come with me, you know!"

"Oh! Why not?" said Jacob. "I'm dying for someone to talk to. Do you mind?"

There was a touch of wistfulness in his voice and his expression. Betty thought he seemed rather a forlorn, lonely person who wanted someone to look after him. She liked him because he kept his bedroom tidy, and because he had deliberately revoked at whist. She wondered whether he had any relations living.

"Oh! Come along," she said briskly. "But I can tell you you won't like it. I've dozens of shops to go to."

7.

Conversation was impossible. The sting of wind-driven sleet that contained an increasing proportion of snow kept their heads down. It caught them full

in the face as they turned into Bedford Square — a desperately bitter, fierce wind, that screamed down the open channel of Gower Street and violently opposed their progress.

"Whew!" said Jacob, as they paused, breathless, under the lee of the houses on the north side of the square.

Betty laughed; her hands, in grey woollen gloves, were up to her burning cheeks. "I like it," she said.

"Oh, yes, rather!" said Jacob, blinking his assaulted eyes. "It's great sport."

"It's the joy of struggle," he shouted, as they fought their way across the square. For in London the wind comes from every quarter of the compass, and now and again some temporarily imprisoned current, furious to make escape, swept across them, or whirled up in an eddy from beneath their feet.

Betty nodded.

The Tottenham Court Road was evidently another main channel for the north wind. Betty wanted to go up to the Euston Road, and at times they had to fight their way blindly step by step. The sleet was giving place to snow. When the fiercer gusts came they carried a driven fury of fine crystals that scourged any unprotected flesh like grape-shot.

"By Jove! it *is* a blizzard," panted Jacob, as they turned with relief into the sudden still warmth of their first shop.

"Winter at last, and no mistake," assented the grocer's assistant, stamping his feet in sympathy with his customer's movements.

Betty shook the water off her hat and looked up with glistening, still intimidated eyes. "Isn't it?" she said; and without further reference to the weather, she entered upon the detail of a long list of orders.

"Look here," she said to Jacob, when her business had been disposed of, "I'm simply not going to let you come any farther."

They were standing at the door of the shop, bracing themselves to a fresh encounter. "What about *you?*" parried Jacob.

"I'm all right. I like it."

"You seem to like so many unpleasant things," remarked Jacob, buttoning up the collar of his overcoat.

She glanced at him, but made no answer to that curious statement. Instead, she returned to an asseveration that her companion must return home.

"Oh no, rather not!" said Jacob, smiling. "I haven't enjoyed anything so much for years."

She attempted a denial, but his face confirmed his words. "Well, if you insist on being so silly . . ." she said.

"Come on," replied Jacob, and they fought their way to the next sheltering shop-door. This time it was a fish-monger's.

The remainder of their conversation was largely interjectory even as they hurried back with the wind mercifully behind them, and powerless to do more than pinch the tips of their ears.

At the door of the boarding-house Betty stopped. "I'm going in this way," she said, intimating the area steps. "I hope you won't catch cold."

"I shall see you to-night, I suppose?" Jacob said, addressing her back.

"Perhaps," she replied over her shoulder.

Jacob waited on the doorstep until she had gone.

They had had a splendid and wonderful adventure. . . .

CHAPTER XXI

INDECISION

1.

Jacob received no answer from Mr. Gresswell until the following Tuesday evening. The articles on "Forgotten Politicians" were returned on the plea that the *Daily Post* was too much concerned with the personalities of living politicians to devote space to reviving memories of those who had been forgotten. Jacob thought this excuse was inadequate, and jumped to the conclusion that his articles were badly written.

The same letter, however, contained matter that was encouraging. "I am sending you some books to-day," wrote Gresswell. "There would be no objection to your living in Cornwall."

The books came the next morning, five of them — two novels and three more solid-looking publications. Jacob rejoiced to have some set work to occupy him again; also, he rejoiced in the thought that he was on the way to earn a living by writing. As he put it, "Gresswell must have liked the stuff I sent him, or he wouldn't have given me all these books to do."

The disappointment consequent on the return of the "Forgotten Politicians" was soon obliterated. The articles were thrust into his portmanteau.

It was difficult to get at, that portmanteau. It was under the bed — the only possible place for it — and always caught in something, and refused to

be hauled out. Frequently the bed moved with it. But it was the only place in which Jacob could keep papers. Three or four times every day he struggled with that most inconvenient bureau, and grew very hot and irritable. Usually he swore.

On this Wednesday morning, as he engaged in the usual tussle, he reflected that there was now no reason why he should not go to Cornwall, why he should not have a sitting-room to himself, and all the freedom and convenience that appertained thereto. Here, in Montague Place, he was confronted with difficulties. His existence was typified by this constant struggle with his portmanteau. In Cornwall . . .

He regarded the glory of it for a few minutes; the intimacy with his intellectual superior, Meredith, who would not only be his mentor in matters of style and composition, but would also be able to advise him as to likely markets for the sale of his essays in literature. And there were still other glories; the joy of free air and the constant sight and sound of the sea. Jacob had always longed to live upon some wild, unfrequented coast. He wanted to experience the drama of a big storm, to watch the heaping of gigantic seas, to feel in sympathy with the great forces, the elemental things which would sweep him clean from the dust and dirt of this huge, depressing London.

He sat on his portmanteau and let his imagination create for him the circumstance of North Cornwall — the sun, and the wind, and the smell of earth. . . .

Outside there were the makings of a good average fog. It had been growing darker for some time, and now the air was turning to a choice tint of yellow, though as yet the houses on the opposite side of the way were plainly visible.

He heard the area-door slam — the woodwork had swollen, and that door was not to be closed by persuasion. Jacob jumped up quickly, lifted his little writing-table on to the bed, threw up the sash of his window, and looked out.

Miss Gale had just reached the top of the area step. She was going to do her marketing. She went a few yards down Montague Place, and then turned and looked up at the house. Jacob waved to her. She returned the salutation quickly, shyly, and then hurried away towards Tottenham Court Road. Before she had gone ten yards, the fog descended in grim earnest, and obliterated her with the rest of the landscape.

Jacob shut the window to keep out that dun, palpable atmosphere. It had turned now to a rich orange colour. He shrugged his shoulders in disgust and coughed. For a moment he regarded his surroundings, tried to push the portmanteau back with his foot, and then thrust it back fiercely with his hands. He lighted the gas, replaced the table before the window, picked up one of his books for review, and lay down on the bed. It was the only place where he could read in any comfort.

But the book did not hold his attention. In five minutes he was sitting on the edge of the bed, steadfastly contemplating a choice of alternatives.

"Shall I go to Cornwall," said Jacob to himself, "or shall I . . ." Even in thought he could not define the second alternative.

And there could be but one answer. He saw that clearly enough. "Damn it! I must go to Cornwall, I suppose," he thought. "I'll write to Meredith — to-morrow."

There had been a hoar-frost in the night. Doubtless at that very moment the Cornish hills were rich

with sunlight; doubtless in Cornwall there was a clean ring in the air, with a fresh, invigorating tang of frost and salt, and the sea was blue as turquoise.

"Damn it! I suppose I ought to go to Cornwall," repeated Jacob.

2.

Miss Gale did not come up that afternoon to tea — the one meal at which there was a decent probability of meeting her. Mrs. Blakey was there, and Jacob learned that that lady was going out to some very grand house for dinner. He was not very attentive to Mrs. Blakey's modestly-depreciatory account of the friends with whom she proposed to dine; he did not mind if Mrs. Blakey dined with the elect or with costermongers. What he was considering was that there would be no whist again that evening. They had not played whist that week. Once Mr. Franklin had been out, and once Miss Gale could not come up. "Too busy," had been her excuse.

He left the drawing-room as soon as he had finished tea, and went back to his own room. There were times when he hated that tiny room, and this was one of them.

He thought of Cornwall again, and with a spasm of sudden resolution dragged out his portmanteau from under the bed, found writing-paper and envelopes, and sat down to write to Meredith. "I must give old Parmenter a week's notice," thought Jacob. "I'll go on Saturday week."

Nothing could have been more definite than the letter he wrote. He fixed Saturday week as the date upon which he might be safely expected. He went down to dinner, feeling slightly more contented. He

felt for some reason that he did not care now what anyone in the house might think of him, and also that there were one or two people there he would rather like to insult before he left.

After dinner he went to the drawing-room. Cigarettes were allowed there, but not pipes or cigars. It was a very quiet little company that night. The German contingent were playing skat in the dining-room, and there was no one in the drawing-room except Mrs. Parmenter — who was obviously suffering from a severe cold in the head — and a rather violent, middle-aged woman with fair hair, who had some business which occupied her during the day, and who was very often out in the evening as well. Her violence was manifested in her opinions. She called herself a new woman — a phrase that still held a special significance at the end of the last century — and overlooked no opportunity for propaganda. She insisted that she smoked because she liked it, and was fond of emphasizing the fact that she was, in her own words, "a working woman." Her name was Miss Dalkeith.

Jacob was not interested in her, nor in Mrs. Parmenter's weak acquiescals in Miss Dalkeith's firm statements of opinion. "I could never fancy smoking myself," snuffled Mrs. Parmenter — her cold grew even worse after dinner —"but I'm sure I see no reason why ladies shouldn't smoke if they enjoy it."

Miss Dalkeith smoked defiantly.

Jacob pretended to read one of his review books.

At half-past nine he wondered whether he would be able to sleep if he went to bed. He had a weak disinclination to go back to his own room. He was tired of being shut up in that box. And while he

was still cogitating, the door opened and Miss Gale came in.

"What a small company!" she remarked, as she walked over to the fire.

"The others are in the dining-room," replied Mrs. Parmenter, "and Mrs. Blakey and Mr. Franklin are out."

"Oh yes; I forgot!" said Betty.

Jacob wondered whether she had forgotten. He did not join in the conversation. He was going to Cornwall in ten days' time, and took no more interest in any of the occupants of that house. But he looked at Betty occasionally when he thought no one noticed him, and he had become suddenly sure that he would *not* be able to sleep if he went to bed.

"Do you smoke, Miss Gale?" asked Miss Dalkeith threateningly.

"Sometimes," replied Betty, and accepted the cigarette which was presented at her.

Miss Dalkeith talked for some time of the disabilities of women, but as neither of her listeners argued with her she soon tired, and announced that she was "a working woman," and had to be up early in the morning. Jacob rose and opened the door for her — a politeness which she seemed to resent.

When he returned to the fire, Jacob thought that this was an excellent opportunity for announcing his contemplated departure. He addressed himself to Mrs. Parmenter, but he watched Betty at the same time.

"I'm thinking some of going down to Cornwall to see Mr. Meredith," was his manner of breaking the news.

"Indeed," said Mrs. Parmenter. "How very pleasant! How long a holiday do you think of taking?"

"Well, it isn't a holiday exactly," said Jacob. "I think of going to work down there altogether."

Mrs. Parmenter sat up and wrestled with her cold. Betty was looking into the fire, and did not seem to be attending. "Oh dear! I hope you're not going to leave us, Mr. Stahl?" said Mrs. Parmenter, when her cold had been temporarily subdued.

"Well, you see," said Jacob, "it would be so much better in many ways for me down there. I shall have my friend Meredith, and the open air, and more room to work in, and — well, I think the country's more inspiring. . . ." He wanted to say more, but hesitated to find words. He felt that he had stated his case very badly. He did not wish to leave the impression that he was glad to leave Montague Place. On the contrary, he had a foolish desire to say that he could never be happy elsewhere.

"It's always the way," replied Mrs. Parmenter, rather tartly. "The nice people never stop long. I don't know why it is."

"It's very good of you," murmured Jacob. "To include me among the nice people, I mean." He looked at Betty, but she was still watching the fire.

"Oh dear!" said Mrs. Parmenter; "what with wud thig and adother . . ." She searched desperately for a clean handkerchief; plainly a sneeze was coming. Betty saved the situation in time by producing her own handkerchief.

"You'd be better in bed, dear," she said.

Mrs. Parmenter, gasping after three excruciating sneezes, murmured: "I don't know when I've had such a cold. . . . Oh dear! oh dear!" A further spasm of sneezing was not to be kept back.

"I'll bring you up some hot lemon when you're in bed," persisted Miss Gale.

"If you *would* excuse me, Mr. Stahl? . . ." said Mrs. Parmenter.

"Oh, certainly. I *do* hope you'll be better in the morning," replied Jacob eagerly.

"It's always worse at night," said Mrs. Parmenter.

"I'll go and put the kettle on," announced Betty.

Mrs. Parmenter lingered for a few minutes, expressing conventional regret that Mr. Stahl was leaving. Mr. Stahl felt inclined to remind her that he was, after all, only the cheapest of boarders.

She went at last.

3.

Jacob sat over the fire and waited.

It was a big, hot fire, and he could not have been cold, but he was shivering. He tried to subdue this physical trembling, and at last rose to his feet and paced up and down the room, but when he returned to his seat by the fire, he dithered again.

"Oh, damn!" he said to himself. "And, after all, probably she won't come back."

Presently he heard the footsteps of someone coming up from the kitchen, but they passed the drawing-room door and went on upstairs.

"Taking that old fool her night-cap," thought Jacob, "and never so much as getting a 'Thank you' for it! What a saint she is!"

By degrees his shivering fit passed. He glanced at the clock, and found that it was nearly eleven. "She's not coming back, of course," he said, and began to pace up and down the room again. He walked with unnecessary vigour, coughed once or twice, and moved a chair noisily now and again.

"What's the old fool keeping her upstairs for?"

he muttered. "Does she have to be read to sleep, I wonder?"

He heard someone coming down the stairs, and stopped in his walk to listen.

Whoever it was, was coming very quietly, and outside the drawing-room door the footsteps ceased.

Jacob held his breath and listened. "She's gone down. She didn't want me to hear her," he thought, took two steps towards the door, and then waited again.

No, she was in the dining-room. Should he go in and speak to her there? He was trembling again. "Oh, my Lord, what a fool I am!" said Jacob Stahl aloud to the empty room. And while he still hesitated the door was opened and Miss Gale came in.

"Haven't you gone to bed yet?" she asked, with every appearance of being surprised. "I thought I heard you go upstairs."

"No," replied Jacob inanely. "No, I haven't."

For a moment they stood and looked at one another, then Betty gave a shiver and went over to the fire. "It *is* cold to-night," she said.

The temperature of the drawing-room was certainly over 70 degrees Fahrenheit.

"Isn't it?" replied Jacob, following her.

For a minute or two they sat opposite to one another in silence, stretching their hands to the fire. That deliberate warming of the hands seemed to render conversation unnecessary.

It was, of course, the woman who broke the silence. "When are you going to Cornwall?" she asked.

"Saturday week," said Jacob. "At least I've written and told Meredith I should come on Saturday week. I haven't posted the letter yet."

"You'll like it down there, won't you?"

"I don't know," said Jacob, very intent still on

that entertaining fire. "I'm not at all sure that I shall."

"How funny of you!" said Betty with a smile. "Why are you going, if you don't want to go?"

Jacob sighed histrionically. It was a real sigh to start with, but he made it carry further than it would have done naturally. "One can't always do the thing one wants to," he said, with fine abstraction.

"No," remarked Betty, encouragingly.

"I can't anyway," said Jacob, forsaking generalities.

"Does Mr. Meredith want you to go?"

"No, not particularly. I mean he wants me in a friendly sort of way, but he can get on just as well without me."

"I suppose living's very cheap down there?"

"Yes, very, I believe; but I wasn't going for the sake of economy."

"No?" said Betty again, giving him every chance of explaining himself.

"You see, I'm running away," said Jacob. "I feel I ought to run away. Perhaps you don't understand?"

"Perhaps I do," murmured Betty.

Jacob's heart was in his throat. They had not even looked at one another, but he did not doubt that she understood, nor that she wanted him to stay.

For a moment they relapsed into silence. Jacob was bracing himself to the task of telling her that one essential fact of his history which imposed so great a barrier between them. "You see," he began, "there is just one thing you don't know. . . ."

But as he prepared to blurt out just that one thing, there came the sound of a key in the front

door, followed by the opening and slamming of that same door.

"Mr Franklin, I expect," said Betty, looking up.

Jacob looked into her eyes. "Oh, he isn't coming in here," he said desperately.

"I expect so. Never mind," replied Betty.

4.

Mr. Franklin was quite an ordinary young man, and was doing very well for himself in business. He wore a beard because he had worked for five years in his firm's Paris house before he settled in London. He rather prided himself on being "Parisian in some ways. . . ."

This evening he had been dining out. He was in evening dress, wearing a bow rather more elaborate than is usual in England. His shirt-front was crumpled, and he had an uncertainty for a moment as to whom he was addressing.

"Hallo!" he said, as he entered the drawing-room: "Hallo! Sorry! Hope I'm not intruding?"

"Of course not. Do come in," said Betty warmly. "Have you had a nice evening?"

Jacob eyed him with marked disfavour, and wondered why Betty was so effusive.

Franklin took a chair in the centre of the hearth-rug and stretched his patent leather shoes out to the fire. After a momentary hesitation, Jacob and Betty seated themselves at right angles to the intruder, one on either side of him.

"Oh, yes, rather," said Franklin. "Had no end of a time. But, I say, I hope I'm not interrupting you?"

"No, no, really," replied Betty.

"I was just going to bed," put in Jacob.

"Don't go to bed," urged Franklin politely. "You're not in the way."

"Thanks!" answered Jacob icily.

Betty frowned.

Jacob wondered why she should be so polite. The brute was half-drunk. Why didn't she snub him?

"Had dinner at the Café Royal," remarked Franklin, "and then we went to the Empire. Saw some of the prettiest gals in London — present comp'ny always excepted, of course."

Jacob flushed hotly. "Look here!" he began, but Betty interrupted him quickly, frowning and shaking her head at him.

"What was the performance like?" she asked. "I've never been to one of those places."

"Performance?" repeated Franklin. "Didn't see much of the performance, you know; too many other things to see." He turned and favoured Jacob with a very deliberate wink.

"Don't you think you had better go to bed, Miss Gale?" said Jacob. "I'll wait and see that the lights are put out."

"No, no. Don't you go to bed, Miss Gale," said Franklin. "Let's sit up and tell stories."

Betty hesitated, biting her lower lip. She looked at Jacob with a question in her eyes.

"Please go, Miss Gale," urged Jacob quietly. He had risen to his feet and made a movement as though he would open the door for her.

"Well, I think I will, if you don't mind, Mr. Franklin," she said. "I've had rather a long day."

"S'pose *you* go to bed, instead," said Franklin, pointedly to Jacob. "We can get along without you, you know."

Jacob looked vicious.

"Oh, please, Mr. Stahl," said Betty. She was

on her feet now, and looked at him pleadingly. There could be no doubt that Jacob was very angry.

"I wish you would go, Miss Gale," he said.

"Well, I'm going. . . ." She moved away towards the door, and when Jacob followed her she laid a hand on his arm and whispered: "Please don't be rude to him."

"I *shall*," replied Jacob.

"Then I shan't go," said Betty.

Franklin had turned in his chair, and was looking stupidly from one to the other. "Look here! Sorry if I'm in the way," he said.

"Oh, shut up!" returned Jacob savagely.

"You've no right . . ." began Betty to Jacob, but Franklin interrupted her.

"Shut up, eh?" he said. "Who're you telling me to shut up?" And he heaved himself suddenly out of his chair.

"You!" said Jacob. "You're drunk and you're making a most disgusting exhibition of yourself. You've insulted Miss Gale, and when you're sober I'll see that you apologize. Now, get out of this and go to bed. Quick!"

Franklin was intimidated. Jacob's eyes were blazing, his mouth set, and he plainly intended to take immediate steps to see that his commands were carried out.

Betty made a movement towards the insulted boarder, but Jacob pushed her firmly on one side. "Get out!" he said to Franklin.

Franklin shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, ces Anglais!" he said, and laughed a high, foolish laugh.

"Are you going?" demanded Jacob.

Franklin, still laughing foolishly, left the room with an air of bravado. They heard him stumbling up the stairs.

"Oh, you shouldn't, you shouldn't," wailed Betty.

"As you said, I've no right," replied Jacob. He was exalted by the consciousness of power.

"It isn't that," said Betty, half afraid of him. "But if you only knew how difficult it is to get good boarders. We had such an awful time last summer, and now we are full again, and we can't afford to lose them, we really *can't*."

"You won't lose him," replied Jacob. "More's the pity. He'll be ashamed of himself to-morrow and apologize."

"It makes it so difficult," she said.

Jacob looked down at her. "Oh, I *must* get you out of this beastly hole," he said.

Betty flushed. "I must go," she said. "It's past twelve."

They were standing close together. Jacob put his hand on her shoulder. She lowered her head instinctively, and he gently kissed her hair. "I'll put the lights out," he said, moving away. "But you must let me talk to you to-morrow, some time."

She made no reply to that. She left him at once without even saying "Good-night." She ran downstairs.

But Jacob was well satisfied. He was a conqueror. Not until he had been in his own room, sitting over his gas-fire for more than half an hour, did some realization come to him of what he had done.

"I *must* go away," he said, then. "I *must* go away — but I will tell her the whole beastly story first. . . ." The thought of it made him shake his head despondently. "Even if she doesn't mind," he said, "I couldn't. . . . She's such a little saint, such a dear saint. . . ."

CHAPTER XXII

CONFESSION

1.

When Jacob awoke next morning that highly emotional scene of the night before presented itself with an air of unreality. He was surprised to remember that he had acted with such determination and promptness with regard to Franklin. He felt a marked disinclination to meet Mr. Franklin at breakfast. That, however, was a very minor detail. The great emotion had been in evidence before Franklin appeared.

Jacob, lying very wide awake in the dark — the light of a match showed him that it was not yet half-past six — set himself to a detailed consideration of his problem. These cold, unromantic hours of the early morning reveal emotional crises in such clear outline.

The word "emotion," indeed, was at first uppermost in his mind. He distrusted himself. Had he not been swept away in a flood of emotion when he had believed himself in love with the woman to whom he was married? What was the difference in his feeling for Betty Gale, and was it an essential or a superficial difference? That was a question which he must determine, quickly and finally. He did not doubt for one instant that there was a difference; that, truly, was the one fact of which he was quite certain.

Curiously he found assurance not in any remem-

brance of the conversations he had had with Betty, nor in the reconstruction of the scene of the previous night — that was an effect — but in the memory of his first sight of her as she stood at the top of the kitchen stairs, wearing a not over-clean white apron, her sleeves tucked up to the elbow. Surely never was a less romantic introduction. Yet he had been irresistibly moved by that picture of her. She had filled his mind, even when he had believed her to be no more than a boarding-house cook. He had taken the image of her to his heart at that moment, as the picture of the one perfect woman to whom he could so gladly devote his life. He saw, now, that he almost regretted that he had been mistaken. If she had been indeed a cook, he could have rejoiced in the glory of loving her — not as an act of self-sacrifice, but because whatever had been Betty's status in life, she must always have been the one woman whom he could perfectly reverence, serve, and worship. And if the conventions of civilization had imposed between them a barrier which had given him the advantage, with what happiness would he have offered himself, feeling, then, that he had some little thing to give.

Now — he had nothing to offer. He was stained and altogether unworthy. She was so far above him that nothing he could render would be any return for so great a gift as her favour. She did favour him. He knew that, and dared not glory in the knowledge, because he was stained and unworthy.

"O God, what a fool I've been all my life!" moaned Jacob. "But how is one to know?"

He tossed uneasily in his bed. Last night he had been a conqueror; this morning he had to confess that he was a criminal.

If he had waited and lived cleanly. . . . He

would have waited if he could have known. Life was so indiscriminate. Why had the controlling forces thrown him at the age of thirty-three into the society of this woman, whom he ought to have known from his early manhood?

He saw it in that light. If he had known Betty from the beginning, all his life would have been other than it had been, would have been infinitely better. There would have been no failure. Circumstance had been responsible for all his failings; he simply had not been strong enough to fight adverse circumstance. There had been that erotic passion for Madeline Felmersdale; splendid, sensuous creature. He might, at least, find consolation in the reflection that few men could have resisted her. He had not tried. He had hurled himself into that passionate affair with furious eagerness. He would do the same again if his life were to be repeated — but if he had known Betty. . . . The thought of Madeline was repugnant in the presence of Betty. *She* made Madeline appear coarse and common . . . unclean. She was unclean, only he had not thought of her in that light before. . . . He saw it with painful distinctness now; and he shared her uncleanness. Curse it! . . .

Lola? Well, that was mere feebleness. Strange that for so small a failing he had to suffer more than for the great offence. He had never loved Lola, of course. She seemed to him now as a person whom he had hardly known. He could hardly remember her most salient characteristics. The point in that connection was, Would she divorce him? But, again, that was impossible. He had not given her cause for divorce, unless she cited Madeline — a cause she had condoned and nullified by her own desertion of him with that fellow Reade. And now it was absolutely

unthinkable that he could ever give her cause for divorce — so unthinkable that he dismissed the idea without considering it.

Betty was the perfect woman, and he had nothing to offer her. His only course was to make confession and go away from her for ever. He must make confession now, because he had shown her last night that he cared, and he could not bear that she should think so ill of him as to believe that he had only cared a little and had gone away. He wanted her to know. He would sooner that she thought him a blackguard who meant to do better, than a careless lover who kissed and ran away. . . .

He had kissed her — kissed her hair. He would not have dared so much if he had not been worked into a highly emotional state by his scene with Franklin.

He returned to that word "emotion," and laughed bitterly. The bleakest of waking hours alone could have led him to use such a word in connection with his feeling for Betty.

No; this time he loved. It was for the first time, but he had no question in his mind about it. There was no need to apply any test.

She made the world and himself seem worthless. But if he had been other than he was, she could have made the world a garden; and himself . . . ? There was no word for it. . . . Just a good man, perhaps. What could be better than to be clean?

He was sick of himself. Surely it must be half-past seven. Anyway, he would get up.

2.

Mr. Franklin had the grace to apologize. He said nothing during breakfast, but afterwards he caught Jacob in the hall and made amends. "Afraid I made

rather a fool of myself," he mumbled. "Hardly remember what I did say. . . . When a lot of fellows get together. . . . Mixed my drinks, I suppose. . . . Sure Miss Gale will overlook it. . . . Sorry to offend Miss Gale. . . ."

"Oh, rather! That's all right. I expect I lost my temper a bit." Jacob was generous. He saw that he had been mistaken about Franklin. He wasn't such a bad chap; merely young. Last night's exhibition had been due to excess of alcohol. Well, anyone might fail in that direction now and again — any young man like Franklin.

"Oh, that's all right, old chap! Forget all about it," said Jacob, as Franklin still mumbled. Inwardly Jacob was conscious of the fact that he was keeping a boarder for Betty. He liked to feel that she and he were playing on the same side. He was glad, also, that Franklin had had the good taste to make these apologies to himself instead of to Betty; she might have been over-generous in her forgiveness. After all, it was as well that such incidents should not be repeated. . . .

When Franklin had gone, Jacob hung about the hall for a few minutes; he listened for the sound of voices in the kitchen but could hear only the voice of the depressed parlour-maid singing "Rock of Ages."

He found his room all ready for him. Since he had spoken about it to Mrs. Parmenter, someone — presumably the housemaid — had always miraculously made the bed, and swept and dusted the room while he had breakfast. This morning she had lighted his gas-fire for him. He wondered vaguely if the housemaid "cursed" him for making requirements which were out of her routine?

It was not yet nine o'clock; he had the whole morn-

ing before him. He had hardly touched those books for the *Daily Post*.

For half an hour he read his paper — none of his notices had appeared as yet. Then he prepared to concentrate on one of his more serious books.

He read five pages, his mind absorbed with the problem as to when and where he could have that necessary interview with Betty; how he was to make any appointment with her — it was so difficult to see her alone. He put his book down on his lap, tilted his chair up against the bed, and speculated on possible opportunities.

Presently he took his book up again, and read another three pages before he arrived at the conclusion that the opportunity must be made, not sought for.

He dismissed the idea of a note in favour of speaking to her when she went out to market in Tottenham Court Road. She usually went about eleven o'clock. He looked at his watch, and found that it was now a quarter to ten. . . .

What a horrible business was this waiting process! He had always been waiting for something. What could one do? He couldn't go down into the kitchen. But he might see if she were in the drawing-room, or the dining-room. She might be. . . .

She was not. Mrs. Parmenter was in the dining-room, busy with accounts. Jacob asked politely if her cold were better — she assured him that it was — and then went to the bookcase, of which he kept one key, and took out two books that he did not require.

As he was leaving the room, Mrs. Parmenter asked him when he was proposing to leave. He told her, and returned to his own room, reflecting that Betty had not given her partner that information about their boarder's date of departure. He wondered

whether the fact was in any way significant. He wondered whether Betty had said anything to Mrs. Parmenter about last night's incident.

At half-past ten he went downstairs again, listened for a few moments by the kitchen stairs, then put on his hat and overcoat, and made his way to the north side of Bedford Square, which he used as a beat. She must come that way. . . .

It was a bright, clear morning, with a sharp wind from the north-east.

3.

She was late. It was half-past eleven before he saw her turn out of Montague Place. For the past ten minutes he had been standing at the corner of Bedford Square, watching that turning, uncertain whether he had not better go back to the house.

He had been doubtful as to how Betty would receive him. She might not like to find him waiting for her. She might think that he was trying to force himself upon her.

He walked slowly to meet her.

Her first words chilled him. "I don't want you to come with me this morning," she said coldly.

"No, I wasn't going to," he answered, a little bitterly.

"I thought you were waiting for me," she said. "I'm very late this morning."

"I was waiting for you," said Jacob. "I waited to speak to you for one minute, that was all. But, of course if you haven't time . . ." He raised his hat and stood aside for her to pass.

"What can you want to say?" she asked, still coldly.

"Oh, nothing — nothing, of course!" returned

Jacob petulantly. "I'm sorry to have worried you. I'm afraid I nearly lost you a precious boarder last night, but it's quite all right. He was very decent about it this morning. I won't do it again. Anyway, I shan't have much chance, as I'm going away myself so soon."

"Was that what you wanted to say?" asked Betty. She was looking past him up Gower Street; her lips were set more closely than usual, and she had a strained look in her eyes. It may have been the wind, which was certainly very keen. Her morning reaction had been far greater than Jacob's, and she had not set herself, as he had, to understand her own feelings. On the contrary, she had very deliberately tried to forget his existence.

"Was that all you had to say?" she said again, as he gave no answer.

"No; it had nothing to do with it," returned Jacob, making way for a tradesman's boy, who came up from an area behind. "Absolutely nothing," he repeated, as he watched the boy go whistling on his way. "I wish I were that boy," he added. "May I walk with you as far as the corner of the Tottenham Court Road?"

"Oh yes; come on. Don't be so frightfully serious," said Betty, more cheerfully.

"But, you see, it is most *frightfully* serious," said Jacob. He was so afraid of leaving her with any misunderstanding. He dreaded that she would think he was going to propose to her, which was precisely what she did think. And in that morning mood she was quite prepared to tell him that he must not "be silly."

"It's like this," he began again desperately. Already they were half across the square. He stopped and faced her. "Just one minute," he said. "I

want to tell you something . . . about myself . . . about my history. . . . It hasn't anything to do with you, really . . . only I want you to know it, and then I'm going away. . . . Whatever you say, I shall go away just the same . . . soon; I shan't wait till Saturday week." A bitter thought occurred to him, and he added: "Of course, I shall pay for a week in lieu of notice."

"Oh, don't be so horrid!" replied Betty.

"That's a little more human," said Jacob. "Women are horribly cruel."

Betty looked hurt. She did not think anyone could call her cruel.

"Would you . . . come for a walk . . . to Regent's Park or somewhere this afternoon?" asked Jacob.

"I don't know about this afternoon," hesitated Betty.

"Oh, let it be this afternoon, for God's sake!" entreated Jacob.

Betty was surprised. She had not understood that he felt so strongly about this interview. She wondered whether she had not, unconsciously, been a little cruel; if she had not regarded his expression of feeling rather too lightly. She had been telling herself that he only thought himself in love with her; that he wanted to have a little flirtation. She had had no personal experience in this kind of affair; she had never been in love, nor been made love to; her only knowledge had been gained from novels, and those she had read but little. Hers had been a very practical life.

"Is it so serious?" she asked.

"Only to me," replied Jacob. "I'm asking a favour. It isn't of the least importance to you."

"Very well, we'll go this afternoon," said Betty.

"But do look a little more cheerful over it. Good-bye."

"Where shall I find you?" asked Jacob.

"I'll come up to the dining-room after lunch."

"Good-bye," said Jacob. "I'm sorry to have kept you so long."

"Yes, lunch will be late," replied Betty.

He looked after her as she hurried away. "She doesn't care," he thought; "I wonder why I thought she did. And if she doesn't, what's the use of my telling her?"

What was the use if she *did* care? was a question equally hard to answer.

4.

They went on the top of a light green "Bayswater" all the way to Kensington Gardens — quite a journey from Tottenham Court Road before the days of motor vehicles.

On the way they talked of things which any other outside passenger might overhear. They were quite content in each other's company.

Jacob was wondering how he could once have thought that Betty was not pretty. She was wearing a little fur (rabbit) toque and stole. The fur set off her fair hair. She had a fine clear complexion, and the north wind had brought a high colour into her cheeks, and mercifully left her nose pale. "Pretty?" thought Jacob with scorn of himself; "she's faultless!"

When they reached the Gardens, they found some protection from the wind on a seat facing the ornamental ponds at the source of the Serpentine.

"We shall have a black frost to-night," remarked Jacob when they were seated.

The sun was turning to an orange red; already it touched the tops of the trees, and a fine tracery of black twigs was sharply silhouetted against the dull glow of its copper circle. It gave no perceptible heat; it seemed strange that it should give so much light. It appeared as a dying fire — a sun that was declining with its satellites into the absolute cold and darkness of space.

"Do you ever think of the world as a little globe spinning round the sun?" asked Jacob suddenly. "You know, just one of a million little balls, that all look very much alike at a distance? And quite probably a lot of the others have endless tiny ants like us swarming all over them."

"No. I don't think I have ever thought of it like that," said Betty.

"I can't put it well," went on Jacob; "I can't make you see it as I can, I expect; but I think it does one good sometimes to get right away from the earth in imagination. It gives one a better idea of how utterly unimportant we are."

"I don't think it's a very good thing to be always thinking of one's own unimportance," replied Betty. "It makes you depressed and miserable. I expect you are too much given to that sort of thing."

"I don't know. Perhaps," replied Jacob. It was the same advice in other words that he had often received before: Have a better opinion of yourself. Yet never did he remember to have had a worse opinion of himself than he had at that moment, as he contemplated the story he had to tell to his companion. He hesitated. Why should he say anything? Why not let things go on as they were for ten days, and then go down to Cornwall?

He glanced at Betty. She was sitting very still. Her hands in woollen gloves were crossed in her lap.

Her expression was thoughtful, a little determined. There was a set of the white chin which reminded Jacob for a moment of Freda Cairns. But Betty was finer than Freda. Betty's rather wide, low forehead was a model for the sculptor, and those clear blue eyes of hers were mother's eyes — so steady, so watchful, so utterly reliable. It was the face of a practical rather than of an imaginative woman.

Jacob felt rested and comforted in her presence. She was the incarnation of his ultimate desire. Her constant encouragement and help would mean everything to him. He had qualities, even qualities of application, and he had intelligence. Hitherto he had lacked an object in life; he had been so detached, so impersonal. Betty would be a very rock to cling to. What was far more, she would create in him a new joy in life.

That, however, was only the selfish view of his longing. It meant more to Jacob that here, indeed, was a woman whom he loved so greatly that he might sacrifice himself. . . .

The silence had lasted for some minutes.

"I'm afraid I can't stay very long," said Betty at last.

"After all, I don't know that it matters so much," returned Jacob, on the crest of the emotion that had been stirring him. "After all, I have come out here with you, and we've been alone together for an hour or two; and perhaps it's better that I should just go away now, and not trouble you any more."

Betty did not look at him, but Jacob, watching her, saw a shadow of trouble in her eyes.

"Perhaps," said Betty slowly, still staring out in front of her,—"perhaps I don't want you to go away."

She was very quiet, she gave no signs of restless

emotion; but Jacob saw that the flush on her face was not now entirely due to the wind.

"Oh, if it could only be like that!" said Jacob, with a sigh. "If it only could!"

"Hadn't you better tell me?" suggested Betty, after another pause.

He was so afraid, so horribly afraid. As he mentally phrased any explanation, he saw himself revealed as a married philanderer. How could he produce in her mind a true picture of himself? She cared for him now; he didn't doubt that she cared for him. But not overwhelmingly, finally. When he admitted the whole beastly truth, that feeling of hers would vanish; it must vanish.

He fidgeted, moved a little away from her, and at last, following her example now, and staring out at the nearly-obscured circle of the crimson sun, he said:

"You see, I've been such a careless sort of fool. I've taken life so much as I found it. I've never thought about the future, or planned, or anything. . . . I've just taken things as they came without bothering. And — and one of the things that I dropped into so casually was . . . well, marriage."

He dared not look at her.

"Go on," she said quietly.

"It was a miserable failure of a marriage," said Jacob. "I don't think it ever promised any happiness for either of us from the first. And we haven't seen each other now for three years . . . three years next March . . . it was in '94 we . . . parted."

"Isn't there any hope of your being happy again?" asked Betty.

Jacob made a noise that suggested a laugh. "With her? Oh no! the thing's inconceivable. Two years and a half ago a friend of mine tried to patch it up between us, but she wouldn't come back."

"Did you want her to?"

"No. It's no use pretending. We pretty well hated each other at the last. But this friend — he was a parson — rather worked on my feelings . . . told me it was my duty, and that sort of thing . . . and so I said I would try and make it up if she would."

"And she wouldn't?"

"No; she wouldn't."

"Where is she now?"

"I haven't the least idea. The last time I heard she was working with a philanthropist woman down in the Borough — a Mrs. Murgatroyd."

"Is she a good woman — your wife, I mean?"

Here was the crux. He could not accuse Lola and leave his own infidelity unconfessed. Jacob Stahl was very loyal, and, in any case, he could not be dishonest with Betty.

"We were neither of us good," he said.

Betty turned and looked at him, put out her hand, and laid it on his arm. He met her look with one which had in it some quality that was beseeching.

"I'm dreadfully, dreadfully sorry for you," said Betty.

"I didn't care a hang till I met you," said Jacob.

"Shall we go back now?" she asked; and he got up without another word.

They did not speak until they had mounted the bus which was to take them back. Then they said little, and that little had no reference to the conversation which had gone before.

But when they had passed Oxford Circus, Jacob put out his hand and took hers, and she allowed him to hold it until they got down.

At the door of the boarding-house they paused and looked at one another.

"I'm going down here," said Betty, intimating the area steps. "I expect dinner will be late to-night."

"And oh, the long, long hours before I see you again!" said Jacob.

"Do you think you ought to see me again?" was Betty's answer; and so she left him miserably happy.

CHAPTER XXIII

DRIFT

1.

Nothing was settled. Responsibility, the necessity for decision, still lay with him. Here was another parting of the ways, and each road was clearly indicated. And oh! so conclusively the guide he called his conscience, pointed his road with steady finger. He read one sign, "To the Land of Renunciation," the other "To Happiness"; and that index never faltered in its indication. Renounce, renounce, was the maddening command that rang in his ears.

It was no new order. The sound of it grew increasingly familiar. Sometimes it had come to him with an alluring ring. It had come so on Hampstead Heath when he first knew Cecil Barker. Then there had risen before him the vision of a fine asceticism, tempting him. He had seen an ideal, he believed; he had attempted to attain it . . . and failed.

The memory of the failure was the outstanding thing. Failure had been the motive of his fugue, repeated in each octave, embroidered, reharmonized, the form of it sometimes disguised so that it appeared as success; but whether the key was a major or minor, the motive was failure.

What promise, then, to will success if the will was wanting? What hope for himself? And when he looked at the other aspect of his trouble, he was confronted with a problem even more difficult to solve by his own renunciation.

How easy it was for that indicative voice to say "Renounce"! How delightfully moral, not to say sentimental, was the idealized figure of the stainless woman! How consistent was this whole solution with the ethics of the Sunday-school.

But, so far as a merely reasonable mind, unhampered by a rule-of-thumb morality, could understand the problem, what would Betty gain if he went and left her? This was the prospect which common sense outlined: a life of slavery in this dingy boarding-house, a life devoted to the petty physical comforts of that heterogeneous crowd which came and went, a life of self-sacrifice, fostering the selfishness of the head of the house, who grabbed whatever was offered, and grabbed ever more greedily. And to what end? At the best the goal was the accumulation of a little money — enough, if things went very well indeed, to provide a tiny pension for old age, when, worn out, hardened, narrowed, embittered by mean drudgery, she — this woman with a mother's eyes — could count her work finished. What futile sterility!

She might marry, of course? That was an alternative, but he could not face it. If his love for her were unselfish enough to bid him leave her now he had found her, it was not fine enough to contemplate that alternative. He writhed at the thought. He could not bear it. He put it from him fiercely, as something inconceivable. It made him primitive, elemental; it filled him with the savage fury of the wild thing. Franklin, for instance? God! he would throttle the beast. . . .

There was such a sweet purity about her.

And if he stayed? And if she were willing to do the great thing, to brave criticism, to go into the wilderness if necessary, to defy the world, convention,

and the Sunday-school ethic? (To say yea to life should have been his summary, but the name of Nietzsche was then unknown to him.) Would she not be doing a greater thing than by the submission of herself to the little rules which ordained that she should live a small life for small ends, spend herself in useless work in order to win a little useless money?

Jacob did truly believe that the woman he loved would lose little and gain much if she did the brave thing, and openly dared the world's opinion. That, at least, was no sophistry. . . .

He thought of his own Aunt Hester. Had not her life been squandered? Had not she, a woman of fine potentialities, declined into the feebleness of a narrow outlook on life? Life? Dear, lovable, good creature that she was, she had never known life. All that she had left behind her was the physical improvement she had effected in his own body. Her very narrowness had forbidden that she should have sent him into the world with a sound mind. Much as he had loved her, he saw very clearly that Aunt Hester had retarded his intellectual development. It seemed that it was by chance only that he had freed himself from the shackles she had thrown about him. No matter that when he had achieved a partial liberty he had made so poor a use of it. That was the one thing he could never regret; he had learned to think independently. . . .

Perhaps that indicative voice was an echo of his early training? He would fain believe it. It must be better for himself and better for his love that they should go away together in defiance of the world's opinion; it must be that by so doing they would win to a vision of wider horizons, grow in strength and knowledge. . . .

Yes, he knew that in this life the great renunciation

was not possible for him. In strange moods of exaltation he might regard sorrowfully his own failure even to keep the ultimate ambition before his eyes, but he understood that he had been hedged around with limitations. At his best he could but dream of the great renunciation. His body and the whole temper of his mind were not fine enough to put the ideal into practice. . . .

That was his epitome: an occasional vision. He hoped, sadly, that the vision might never be finally withheld from him. . . .

2.

While Jacob diluted sound philosophy with emotional sophistries that were urged by himself now on one side and now on the other, Betty, more certain of herself, and with no philosophic doubts to resolve, could put aside brooding for the moment and lose herself in her work.

The chief issue with her between six o'clock and seven-thirty was the boarders' dinner — an issue to which all emotion must give place.

But when that meal had been carried to a successful conclusion, and the long succession of the fouling and washing of china and crockery had been disposed of for that day, she sat for a time on the side of the bed in her own little room and tried to contemplate the situation.

Her mind was largely influenced at the moment by the memory of washing up the dinner-things. She resented the suggestion that this endless routine of cooking food and then destroying the relics of it was to be her life-work. She had hardly paused to think of it before. All her life she had worked. At home she had taken her mother's place from the time

she had been fourteen. She had left home a year before, because she was no longer essential to her father's household. There was another sister now, capable to take the post of housekeeper, and not capable, as Betty had proved herself to be, of earning her own living.

Betty had had a capital of £200 — money left her by her mother — and all but £25 of this she had invested in the boarding-house in Montague Place. It had been a splendid bargain for Mrs. Parmenter, who saved £30 a year, cook's wages, and found a competent manager to run the whole house. Betty was not a full partner as yet; she was to take one-third of the net profits.

It was not too glorious a prospect which was held out by a share in this boarding-house, and Betty at the mature age of twenty-six had to face what so many other women have to face — a sterile and joyless future, a life made up of the little satisfactions of small duties well done. In her case this satisfaction was largely confined to the endless cooking of food and the obliteration of the dirt it left behind.

Round that dull circle her mind ran until she pulled herself up to glance — it was an act of courage — at any possible alternative.

Her disapproval began and ended with one criticism: "It wasn't right." For herself she was not sure that she cared greatly. Her Church was not a living religion to her. She believed because she had always been taught to believe, and in an indifferent, unthinking way she regarded agnostics (atheists, she called them), together with Roman Catholics, Dissenters, Mahommedans, Jews, and the heathen generally, as lost souls whom it was someone's duty to save. Her father had tendencies toward Ritualism, so the duty — as regarded the heathen, at least — devolved,

she supposed, principally upon the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. But when it came to a matter of personal conduct, it was not the thought of any Christian ethic, but rather of the attitude her father would take up, and all the people she knew. Her home friends, and such acquaintances as Mrs. Parmenter, would, she could not doubt, agree with her father.

"It wasn't right"— that was all there was to say.

Yet, despite that firm judgment, which she made no attempt to analyze or controvert, she was lukewarm in her adherence to the intrinsic rightness, as she saw it, of turning an instant cold shoulder upon Jacob Stahl.

She was not desperately in love with him. If she had been, she would, with fine feminine self-denial, have found "rightness" with few qualms, in sacrificing her hope of heaven for the sake of the man. But she was greatly attracted by him, and her heart was full of sympathy for him.

That strange dispensation of Nature which ordains that certain men and women should instantly recognize each other as fit and proper mates, had worked upon Jacob and Betty. They had been attracted to each other from the first. Jacob, ripe for this meeting, had been overwhelmed. Betty, still undeveloped in all sexual experience, needed a period of contiguity to warm her feeling of attraction into something great enough to override obstacles.

As she sat on her bed that night she thought of Jacob as "rather a dear thing," whom she would like to comfort and care for. She was not angry with him. She did not condemn him for what he had done. If he had been free, her feeling for him would doubtless have been strong enough to overcome her practical objections to marriage on the ground that

he had no income. That she might have risked. She felt for him, even then, as much as most young women feel for the unknown man they marry in order to find a home.

But there was a woman to whom Jacob had been joined in the holy sacrament of marriage, a bond which two powers alone were strong enough to break — Death and a Judge of the High Court. And if neither of these mighty powers intervened, there could be but one aspect of the question which she need consider. "It wasn't Right."

"I don't think I shall go upstairs to-night," thought Betty, and to save herself from any possible solicitation of Mrs. Blakey, she put the matter beyond doubt by going to bed.

Jacob hung about in the drawing-room till nearly half-past eleven, and then went despairing to his own room.

His reading of Betty's decision — implied as he fondly supposed by her absence — was that "she didn't care."

Neither of them went to sleep for a long time. That restlessness seemed quite natural and proper to Jacob; a cause for wonderment to Betty.

3.

Jacob had not yet posted his letter to Meredith. It stood on his mantelpiece, conspicuously. He wasted much time on Friday in looking at it and speculating. He regarded it as a symbol; while it remained in the house there was still a hope for him. To post that letter meant that all hope was over.

It is evident that even by Friday, his attitude towards the problem had suffered a change. He no longer regarded himself as the arbiter. The re-

sponsibility had been shifted; or was it that the problem bore another aspect? It was not now a question of should he go away without speaking to Betty again? but "would she send him away?"

On Friday such time as was not spent in studying the symbol propped up on the mantelpiece was chiefly occupied by protracted visits to the dining-room bookcase. His only other amusements were short trips to the pillar-box at the end of the street. He took five of these trips altogether on Friday, and not once did he catch sight of Betty at the kitchen window, though he looked searchingly every time. These ten blanks seemed to suggest that she was avoiding him. They were hardly explicable by any theory of coincidence.

Mrs. Blakey and Mr. Franklin were both in to dinner that night, and afterwards Jacob remarked with an elaborately careless air that they didn't seem to have had much whist lately.

Mrs. Blakey looked at him and smiled. Then she clicked her tongue and addressed Mrs. Parmenter. "Cht, cht! You hear that, Mrs. P.?" she said. "There's nothing, I'm sure, brings Mr. Stahl here in the evening but just the hope of a game of whist. Now I do think Miss Gale might sacrifice herself for once and come and entertain us."

Mrs. Parmenter stretched her neck, put her head a little on one side and raised her eyebrows. "Well, I can but ask her," she said propitiatingly, "and I will."

"Extraordinary old fool," thought Jacob.

"Do now, there's a good soul," replied Mrs. Blakey. "I don't like to see Mr. Stahl moping like this — just for a game of whist."

"I wonder what the woman's driving at," was Jacob's thought. To show his complete indifference

he said, "Oh, don't bother on my account; I've lots of work I can do."

Mrs. Blakey looked sly. "You're working too hard," she said, as Mrs. Parmenter left the room. "I shall tell Miss Gale to make you go out more."

"Miss Gale?" asked Jacob frigidly. "Why Miss Gale?"

"Oh, there, don't look so innocent!" replied Mrs. Blakey, and Franklin, the only other person present, wagged his head and brushed up his moustache.

Jacob, hating them both, picked up a book and pretended to ignore Mrs. Blakey's remark that "Someone was rather huffy to-night." He had not learnt yet that Mrs. Blakey was a warm-hearted old woman, despite her superficial selfishness.

Mrs. Parmenter returned to say dolefully that she was afraid Miss Gale couldn't come. "She's had a headache all day, and she's gone straight to bed," was the reason put forward.

Mrs. Blakey twisted her mouth and looked a little spiteful. "Well, what about dummy?" she asked; and Jacob, loathing the prospect, had no option but to acquiesce in the suggestion.

He was mildly avenged for the penance Mrs. Blakey had imposed, by the extraordinary luck which followed him. No matter whether he played the dummy or had Mr. Franklin for a partner, he held wonderful cards.

Mrs. Blakey threw down her hand at the end of two rubbers, and declared she had had enough. "You're uncannily lucky at *cards*, Mr. Stahl," she said, with such emphasis and earnestness that Jacob felt a horrible thrill of superstition run through him. It was so obvious that Mrs. Blakey had perfect faith in the wisdom of the old saw.

Jacob disliked her more than ever.

The only crumb of comfort he could discover when he was thankfully safe from observation in his own little box-room, was the thought that Betty had gone to bed early with a headache. She had been disturbed, he argued. She had, at least, been worrying. It seemed to him that anything was better than blank indifference. Of course, the headache might have been merely an excuse. Or she might be subject to headaches. . . . She didn't look the sort of person who would suffer from headaches. . . .

Having begun the vicious circle of useless argument, he found it impossible to stop. At half-past one he got out of bed, lit the gas and the fire, and sat down to read and smoke. For a time he managed to keep his attention on his book, which had no reference whatever to affairs of the heart.

But when he returned to bed his brain took up the old thread again. . . .

"Oh, damn, damn, damn!" moaned Jacob. "What an infernal fool I am! I'll go right away to-morrow. No woman is worth all this torture."

He found that it was ten minutes past four.

"I might just as well get up," he reflected, and even as he considered the idea, he fell asleep.

4.

Betty came up to lunch the next day, for the first time since Jacob had been in the house.

Mrs. Parmenter had reported earlier in the morning that she was afraid Mr. Stahl was going to be ill. "He'd great dark hollows under his eyes this morning, dear. I do hope he won't be ill here. That would be unfortunate when he's going away so soon. D'you think I'd better get a doctor for him?"

Betty thought she knew a better cure, but she only

said she didn't expect it was anything, but that she'd come up to lunch and see him for herself. She was very practical and off-hand about it, and Mrs. Parmenter — who had neither Mrs. Blakey's eye for essentials nor her keenness of intuition — had no suspicion that her partner was in any way responsible for Jacob's woebegone appearance.

"I suppose I *am* being horribly cruel," reflected Betty, "but what *is* one to do?"

She was startled when she saw Jacob at lunch. Two bad nights had certainly made a difference in his appearance. His face looked drawn and his eyes tired. Betty's best feelings were stirred.

There were only the three of them there — Mrs. Blakey was mercifully out — and when the meal was over Mrs. Parmenter announced that she thought she would lie down for a bit. She always put it in that way; she never seemed to remember that she lay down after lunch every afternoon.

"Go into the drawing-room," commanded Betty when Mrs. Parmenter had gone. "I'll come to you there when these things are cleared away and washed up."

Jacob went and spent a miserable half-hour waiting for her. He was on tenterhooks all the time. Suppose Mrs. Blakey came back . . . suppose someone called . . . suppose she didn't come after all. . . .

5.

"Well," remarked Betty cheerfully, when she at last appeared. "Well, what have you been doing to yourself? You can give me a cigarette, if you like."

"Oh, I'm all right," said Jacob. "Why?"

"Look in the glass," was the answer he received.

"It's nothing. I've been sleeping badly," he returned.

For two or three minutes they sat in silence on opposite sides of the fire, smoking.

"I haven't posted my letter to Meredith yet," was the bomb with which Jacob exploded the silence.

Betty immediately grasped the significance of that curious statement.

She knitted her brows. "I don't see . . ." she began, and then: "What *is* the good of your staying here?"

Jacob struggled with a sigh that came in little gasps. He had a feeble intention to suppress it, but it was too strong for him. "*I* don't know," was all he said, and smoked gloomily.

"What *can* one *do?*" persisted Betty.

"Nothing, absolutely nothing," was Jacob's flat, all-inclusive reply.

They were both aware that these remarks were quite meaningless, merely prolegomena.

This time they both sighed, Jacob frankly.

"It isn't as if you cared a hang," he said, to make his real opening.

"I don't see that that has anything to do with it," answered Betty, with a blind belief that she was stating a fact.

Jacob made jerky sounds to imitate a laugh. "Hasn't it?" he remarked enigmatically.

"You see," said Betty, tackling the situation and coming to her final word. "It isn't right."

"Oh, you know what right and wrong are?" he asked.

"Of course," she replied without hesitation.

"I wish I did," said Jacob.

"But you don't mean? . . ."

"I mean I've been trying to find out ever since I've

learned to think. You've got a rule of thumb, I suppose, that someone taught you. Of course they were right. I used to think so, too."

"Are . . . are you an atheist?" trembled Betty.

"No," returned Jacob. "An agnostic, if you like."

"It's the same thing."

"Not a bit the same thing."

Betty wondered for a moment; then she asked: "What's the difference?"

"The difference between making a statement and asking a question."

"But you don't believe in God?"

"Yes, I think I do, in a vague way — not your silly little God with a beard who sits on an Oriental throne made of gold and precious stones, and finds his only pleasure in adulation."

Betty flinched a little. "What sort, then?" she asked.

"That's just the point," said Jacob gloomily. "God isn't to be described in human language, nor conceived by human thought. The only certain thing about Him to me is that He is not a glorified Jewish patriarch who makes infallible rules for anyone and everyone, is stupidly jealous when his flatterers go after another potentate, and displays it by venting a spiteful anger on the deserter's children — who is, in fact, the typical Oriental autocrat."

"I don't believe that either," returned Betty defiantly.

"But you do," said Jacob. "If you had given up believing in that idea, you would have had to find a substitute, and then you would have found out that you couldn't decide these extraordinarily difficult problems of right and wrong by your rule of thumb." He paused a moment, and then added: "Anyway,

you must see that a few miles of sea makes all the difference. It is a sin to marry your deceased wife's sister in England, but you can do it in the Channel Islands without upsetting your neighbour's nice sense of morality."

"Oh yes, that's silly," said Betty. "I've always thought so."

"The whole thing's relative," said Jacob.

"Give me another cigarette," said Betty.

For a few minutes they smoked again in silence. Jacob had been warmed to his own eloquence, and that and the near presence of Betty put heart into him once more. It was Betty, however, who restarted the conversation. Womanlike, she came straight to the point at issue.

"But I don't see," she said, "how — whatever you think — you can make out that it isn't wrong for you . . ."

"To love you," supplied Jacob.

"Well . . ." qualified Betty.

"I know," said Jacob.

"Because if I did care . . ."

"I should be content to know that," said Jacob. "Quite content. If I could see you now and again, perhaps . . . in the afternoon . . . and knew you cared just a little, I shouldn't want any more. I could go on working and waiting. Something might happen. . . ."

"You don't even know where she is?"

"No, I suppose I could find out."

"She might be . . . ill, for all you know."

"Or dead," said Jacob thoughtfully. "No, I'm sure I should have heard if she'd been dead. But I'll find out."

"Well, you might do that, you know," said Betty.

"Yes, I will, anyway. Only . . ."

"Yes?"

"About my going away?"

"I don't see that you . . . need go . . . at once."

"Oh! Do you mean that really?" There was such relief, such gratitude in his tone that she looked up a little surprised.

"Do you care so much?" she asked. In truth it did seem to her a strange and incredible thing that anyone *could* care so much for her.

Jacob smiled sadly. "I only want to be near you," he said.

"You mustn't expect to see very much of me."

"No, I won't expect anything."

There was another pause, and then he said: "Do you care a little . . . Betty?"

"I don't know," she replied, with great deliberation.

"Do you mind my calling you 'Betty' when we are alone?"

She shook her head.

"Not a bit?"

"No."

Jacob's heart was beating very fast — there was just one more request he had to make, and he was afraid. "Betty," he said at last, got out of his chair, and knelt by the side of her, "may I kiss you, just once?"

"Isn't it rather silly?" she said, her face turned away from him.

"Perhaps." He put his arms round her shoulders and drew her towards him. He was suddenly masterful and resolute.

Her resistance was very feeble. . . .

"You said *once*," she protested suddenly, and pushed him away.

He rose and stood with his back to the fire. His

face was glowing. She looked up at him and wondered if this could be the same man she had pitied at lunch.

"And now you won't be silly — or miserable — any more?" she asked briskly.

Jacob smiled. "I'm happier than I've ever been in my life," he said.

"Rubbish," said Betty.

"It isn't," replied Jacob. "Oh, curse it!" he added, as he heard the front door slam.

The next moment Mrs. Blakey looked in.

"Oh, I apologize," she said. "All right, don't you worry. I'm going."

"So am I — to get the tea," said Betty, and escaped.

"H'm! You're looking a little brighter this afternoon. It seems some people have the luck both ways," remarked Mrs. Blakey.

Jacob thought that, after all, Mrs. Blakey was "not a bad old sort."

Betty in the kitchen, told herself that she had let Jacob kiss her because she wanted to see what it was like. She was quite determined that it must never happen again. Not, of course, because she had been disappointed, but because it wasn't right. . . .

CHAPTER XXIV

MORE LEEWAY

1.

Lola was still with Mrs. Murgatroyd. Lola's conversion had apparently been of a different texture from the conversion of Jacob. She was Mrs. Murgatroyd's secretary, her most trusted lieutenant; but for some reason that was not made perfectly clear she refused to consider any suggestion that she should give Jacob his liberty.

Privately he had considered that subject. The plea of infidelity was a technical point. He need only hire some woman — Heaven knew he need not look far down Regent Street to find such a woman — and be shut into some private place with her for half an hour, and the Court would have all the evidence it required on that point.

It would be a shameful proceeding. If any report of it transpired he would be regarded no doubt with disgust by all decent people. But it would be a million times better than that any shadow of disgrace should fall upon Betty. She would understand, she would not blame him.

Lola, however, was obdurate. The Vicar had been called in again. Jacob had made a special appointment with him, and at the appointment had made a partial confession.

Barker's first line had been: "Bring her to see me, my dear fellow."

"Not yet," had been Jacob's reply.

And though there had been at first a little friction between him and the Vicar, Barker had maintained his reputation. He had worked hard. He had even faced Mrs. Murgatroyd, despite the coldness which still obtained between them.

It may have been that coldness which affected the issue. Mrs. Murgatroyd's influence over Lola was paramount, it seemed. The upshot, in any case, was a firm refusal to have anything to do with Jacob Stahl. There was an air about the message which seemed to suggest that Jacob had at last come out in his true colours as a thorough-paced scoundrel.

After the ultimatum had been issued, the Vicar was sympathetic, but no longer helpful. "Why not try to live the life?" he asked.

Jacob replied boldly that it was not his *métier*.

When the Vicar suggested that there was a danger of declining into sin, Jacob replied that Mr. Barker had not seen Betty, or he would not make so mad a statement.

"Is she so virtuous?" asked Barker.

"Isn't that beside the point?" asked Jacob. "I believe she is as innocent and pure as any woman alive. . . . He had to fall back upon aposiopesis. What way did this argument tend? Was he not stultifying his own contentions? Barker gave such a twist to everything he touched. . . .

Incidentally Jacob learned that Woodhouse was in prison.

"Best place for him," Barker said. "Keep him away from the drink. What a curse it is, my dear fellow!"

2.

The letter to Meredith had not been destroyed. In the flush of glory that Friday evening Jacob had stowed it away carefully in his portmanteau. He intended to keep it as a memento. He had written another to say that he had altered his plans. He had hinted that it would not be wise, for reasons connected with his work for the *Daily Post*, that he should leave London.

That work was prospering in the face of difficulties. Jacob worked now with enthusiasm to pass the long hours, sometimes days, in which there was no hope of seeing Betty. More books came before he had finished those he was reviewing; and the notice he had written of the art book appeared well placed in the paper during the third week of January. He showed it to Betty, and they were both rather proud of it.

He was a conscientious and capable general reviewer, within limits. He was not a specialist, but those books which called for special treatment did not come his way — sometimes to his disappointment. Within his limits, however — and they were, perhaps, somewhat wider than those of the average reviewer — he did very well. He was quick to appreciate the trend of an argument; he was quite capable of regarding a book as a whole; he had a fairly good memory; and he had read widely, if indiscriminately. Added to these qualifications, he was learning very rapidly to express himself in respectable, intelligible English. He had a genuine feeling for style, and if at this time he had not definitely developed a characteristic style of his own, his reviews were always decently phrased, consequent, and passably free from clichés.

Gresswell secretly congratulated himself on having discovered a reviewer so competent and conscientious; there was the mark of that last, most admirable quality on every review he wrote, partly due to a neophyte's nervousness, possibly. And if Jacob did not know of Gresswell's admiration directly, he received sufficient evidence of it in the steady tale of books that came week by week in answer to the slightly apologetic list of suggestions he forwarded every Monday evening.

So he had occupation enough during the long intervals of time that separated one sight of Betty from the next. He had work that he could do, and that he found a joy in doing — work which furnished him with suggestions, and made no demand on his initiative. If it had not been for the shadow that lay between him and Betty, he would have been very happy.

As it was, he was happier, perhaps, than he had ever been.

3.

The meetings with Betty showed a tendency to increase in frequency and length.

The process was a slow one at first.

After that glorious Friday afternoon when he had kissed her for the first time, he did not see her alone again for nearly a week.

He was very patient during that time. He had said that he was content to be near her, and for the present he certainly believed that that was a true statement. So he was not exigent. Sometimes he looked at her a little wistfully when she came to the drawing-room in the evening, but he made no attempt to see her at other times. He did not waylay

her on her road to market, for instance, as he so easily might have done.

His patience was rewarded by an invitation to go shopping with her in Oxford Street one afternoon; and when the shopping — quite an insignificant amount — was done, they walked down to the Marble Arch, and Betty consented to have tea with him in a dairy. She made but one stipulation: she must be back by half-past five to cook the dinner.

Jacob cursed the dinner openly. Not, as he explained, so much because it took her away from him, as because he hated the thought that she should be confined in that underground kitchen, working on behalf of a lot of "beastly boarders."

"They must have dinner," said the practical Betty.

"Oh, I know; and I'm one of them, and help to eat it," replied Jacob; "but . . ." He thought it might be taken as a presumption upon his privileges if he completed the sentence.

"I don't mind cooking a bit," said Betty.

"You're an angel," said Jacob in a low voice.

"Do angels cook?" asked Betty.

"No, that's devils' work," he replied grimly.

"Hardly complimentary to me," was Betty's comment. They were well pleased with each other that afternoon. . . .

4.

There was another afternoon in the middle of February, which marked a definite stage in the progress of their intimacy.

The only definite excuse for their walk was the weather; there was no shopping to be done.

It was a mild, still, sunny day — a foretaste of spring that March would no doubt obliterate, but it

carried the promise of the increasing days. The worst of the winter was gone, with all its darkness and suspense of life; the stir of growth was in the air again. The birds knew it.

Jacob and Betty instinctively sought wider horizons, and since in Hyde Park and Kensington Gardens one could never forget that enceinte of houses and paved roads, they went by tram to within walking distance of London's cleanest open space, and finally rested on the high ground overlooking the Vale of Health.

When they had alighted from the tram, their attention had been claimed by a small boy who was selling the early edition of an evening paper. "Well-known Countess killed in the Hunting-Field" had been the compelling announcement on his display-bill — an announcement he had abbreviated into "Countess killed," which was an easier phrase for shouting repetition, and heightened the mysterious suggestion of the tragedy. "Killed by whom?" was a question which presented itself as much as "Killed by what?"

Jacob had bought the paper, with a smile at the boy's importunacy. What was a Countess more or less to him?

But when they had reached their seat on the high ground, Betty's feminine curiosity — or it may have been some expression of that reverence for the ruling classes which had naturally been a part of her education as the daughter of a country parson — prompted her to seek further details of the tragedy.

"Oh Lord!" said Jacob, smiling, as he handed her the paper. "Why should one be more interested in the death of an Earl's wife than in the death of those other wives who are dying every half-hour or so all the time?"

"I don't know," said Betty. "One is."

"I'm not," replied Jacob. "Who was it?"

"There you are," laughed Betty — they were both in high spirits that afternoon — "you *do* want to know, you see."

"I'm interested in everything that interests you," he said.

"Pooh!" said Betty, holding the paper away from him.

"Really, I don't care who it was," he protested. "Lady Bunkum or Lady Taradiddle, it's all the same to me. I don't know them, and I'm never likely to."

"It wasn't either of those," said Betty.

Jacob was chiefly occupied in admiring the brightness of Betty's eyes, but he kept the game going for her amusement. "I know you're dying to tell me," he said.

"I've a good mind to make you guess."

"I simply don't know their names," said Jacob.

"You'd know this one. She was notorious."

Jacob shook his head.

"You're pretending," said Betty. "Do you mean to say you've never heard of Lady Paignton?"

Betty saw him blanch and wilt. "Good God!" he said. "Let me see"; and he stretched out an eager, unsteady hand for the paper.

Betty was sobered and shocked. She had not read the account of the accident; it had not been in the morning papers. She had merely grasped the fact that a woman whom she had heard described in no flattering terms had died suddenly. Betty had the haziest idea as to what sort of a person Lady Paignton was in real life, or as to how old she was. To Betty she was merely a bad, beautiful woman who moved in high society.

But Jacob had a vision of that lovely, vital thing lying in the mud with a broken neck — such a white, round neck it had been. He saw her again in imagination as a bewitching child of fourteen in the Elmover spinny; as his own imperious, fascinating mistress a few years later . . . as the bewildering Lady Paignton. . . . He thought of that scene with her in the cab, when he had resisted all the magic of her beautiful person. She had been so full of life. She was not a Countess. She was Madeline.

"Jimmy dear, what is it?" Betty had come closer to him, wondering. She put her hand on his arm. "Did you know her?" Jacob was recalled, or partly recalled, to present surroundings. For one moment Betty was a stranger to him — someone he had known for a few weeks only. She had not fully entered into his life yet. There had been a time when Madeline had controlled him, dominated his thoughts and his emotions; the memory of her was woven into the very texture of his being.

"Did you know her?" repeated the puzzled Betty.

"All my life nearly," he said.

"I thought you didn't know any Countesses," said Betty, chaffing him, trying to rouse him from his abstraction. She thought he was being a little stupid about the affair.

"Oh, she wasn't a Countess. She was Madeline," said Jacob.

Betty's smile was smoothed out.

"Do you mean that you knew her intimately?"

The vision faded then. Jacob realized that he was sitting on Hampstead Heath with the woman he loved far better than he had ever loved Madeline, and that this woman was asking him very pertinent questions, which he might find it inconvenient to answer.

Madeline had cut him the last time he had seen her. That was the remembrance which he might best retain. But he could not lie to Betty.

"Oh yes, intimately — a long time ago," he said.

"Were you in love with her?"

"I suppose so," said Jacob, wishing he had the courage and skill to give a more picturesque version of his old relations with Madeline.

"Did she care for you?"

"Well, we were practically children when it began," said Jacob. "The Felmersdales lived near us in the country. I saw a good deal of her then at one time or another. She was only seventeen, and I was twenty-one."

"Did you never see her after that?"

"Oh yes. I saw her in London again, after she was married."

"Recently?"

"No, no. I haven't seen or heard of her for nearly three years," replied Jacob eagerly. He was on safer ground now. "She cut me in Hyde Park the last time I saw her," he went on. "She was with some man or other, and pretended to be quite unaware of my existence."

"You must have been frightfully in love with her once," remarked Betty.

"Why?" prevaricated Jacob.

"You were so upset when you read about her."

"I don't see that that proves anything. I've got rather a vivid imagination, and it is rather a shock to picture anyone you've known fairly well lying dead with her neck broken."

"Especially if she was so very beautiful," commented Betty coldly.

"She was beautiful," assented Jacob.

"It's time we were going home," said Betty.

"Surely not," protested Jacob. "Aren't we going to have tea first?"

"I shan't have time to-day," returned Betty. "There's a big joint to cook, and it will have to go on early."

"Well, five minutes longer," pleaded Jacob. "I had such a lot to say to you."

"We really ought to be going back," said Betty. "It'll take us three-quarters of an hour to get home."

"Betty," said Jacob, when they had gone a few yards.

"Well?"

"Don't be unkind."

"Unkind? Why should I?" She looked at him with raised eyebrows.

"I don't know why you *should*, but you *are*," said Jacob.

"What have I said?"

"Nothing. Betty! You're not going to think that I'm . . . I'm fickle, or anything of that sort, are you?"

"No!" with a fine air of not having considered the subject; "I wasn't going to think about it at all."

"Because I'm not," said Jacob.

"Am I really only the third?" asked Betty. "Or were there others you haven't told me about yet? We might as well have the whole list now, and have done with it, to save further surprises."

"You are the first, Betty — really and truly the first."

Betty sniffed. "That's idiotic," she remarked.

"It isn't," said Jacob. "Neither of the other two meant to me what you mean."

"Used you to kiss her?" Betty's tone was contemptuous.

"Yes," replied Jacob. He was reaching the limits of his patience.

They walked on in silence after that, but when they were nearing the tram terminus, Betty turned and looked at him. "Was she always a bad woman?" she asked.

It was a horrible question, and Jacob threw loyalty to the winds. He could not bear that Betty should think him a seducer.

"I was not her first lover, if that's what you mean," he said.

"You *were* her lover, then?"

Jacob nodded and bit his lip.

Betty gave her head a little toss, and there was an ugly, contemptuous curl at the corners of her mouth.

They did not speak again until they were nearly at the door of the boarding-house. Then Jacob, a little desperate, said: "Betty dear, you're not going to let that make any difference to us, are you? I couldn't bear it, if I lost you — really I couldn't."

"What difference could it make?" returned Betty coldly. . . .

Jacob found much difficulty in working that evening. He was tortured by doubts. He dared not think of the effects his confession might have upon Betty. But he had one little source of consolation: Betty had been jealous. There could be no question of that. She had learnt to care for him a little, or she could not have been jealous.

He did not expect to see her in the drawing-room after dinner, but she came, and for the first time outstayed the others. Mrs. Blakey was the last, and Jacob, foreseeing the possibility of one quiet word with Betty before going to bed, fumed in-

wardly and fidgeted outwardly at the old lady's very deliberate sipping of her final whisky.

But Mrs. Blakey — her stay may have been consciously prolonged — rose at last. "Now, don't you two young people be too long saying 'Good-night,'" she remarked, as she went out; and she shook a fat, admonitory finger at them.

Jacob expected that Betty would hurry after Mrs. Blakey, but she did not; and the old woman most thoughtfully closed the door behind her.

For a moment Jacob and Betty stood and looked at one another. Then he moved towards her, put his hands on her shoulders, and, she made no resistance, drew her close to him and kissed her.

That embrace — the most intimate he had ever ventured — lasted for a whole perfect minute. Then Betty, quietly freeing herself, said: "I think she was a horrid woman." She wrinkled her nose and made a moue at him.

"Never think of her again," said Jacob. "I never shall."

But Betty reminded him of Madeline many times after that reconciliation. There were times when Jacob was glad that there was no chance of ever meeting Madeline again. . . .

5.

That afternoon certainly marked a definite change of temper, and Jacob at least soon realized the significance of the change.

His restlessness, his longing for Betty's presence, became continually more marked, and he often considered the question of her future, though for a long time he kept any reference to that question out of his conversation.

The precedent for saying "Good-night" begun by that little reconciliation after Betty's first exhibition of jealousy, soon became established. It may seem a small thing, but it was, indeed, a great influence.

The "two minutes" at first assigned as a limit to the sweet intercourse that followed the retirement of Mrs. Blakey — she was always the last to go — grew by infinitely slow accumulations.

"Oh! you can stay five minutes. I've hardly seen you all day," was a sufficient excuse on some occasions; and when the clock was not watched, five minutes grew to ten; and then ten minutes was the agreed period that was put upon the interview, which lasted for a quarter of an hour.

The house was nearly empty at Easter — Mrs. Blakey had gone to Harrogate for a fortnight — and during that happy time the "Good-night" lasted for an admitted half-hour after Mrs. Parmenter retired at ten o'clock — her invariable limit.

The night before Mrs. Blakey returned they discovered suddenly, Betty with horror, that it was half-past eleven, and that they were still saying "Good-night," and even after that shock it was another five minutes before the lights were out. "This has got to stop to-morrow," Betty said; and Jacob regretfully agreed.

It was not good for the reputation of the house. Mrs. Parmenter, blind as she was, had at last remonstrated; but, as she knew nothing of Jacob's ineligibility, her remonstrance had not been very urgent. She had a vague idea that the two young people liked each other, but she did not anticipate any climax that would upset the regular working of her boarding-house. Her acknowledgment that she guessed

what was going on, had taken the form of a mild caution.

"I don't think it's quite the thing, my dear," she said, "to sit up with Mr. Stahl so long after the rest have gone to bed. Some of the boarders might talk; and you're out with him most afternoons as well."

Betty's face flamed. She mumbled something about being rather sorry for Mr. Stahl, and then, straightening her back — she was making pastry — said: "All right, I know; it shan't happen again."

Mrs. Parmenter wobbled her head about in a propitiatory way, and remarked: "It's not me that minds, my dear, but you know how folks will talk."

The next night, though Mrs. Blakey was tired, and went to bed at half-past ten, the last caress was given and taken in the original two minutes, and it was a week before those two minutes once more stretched to ten.

Then came another reaction on Betty's part. "Jimmy, it won't do," she said. "Everybody knows about us. They'll say things if we stay up here when everyone's gone to bed."

"Everyone hasn't gone," pleaded Jacob. "The Germans are still in the drawing-room."

"Oh, I know," said Betty; "and when they come here they knock at the door and look apologetic. Mr. Meyer looks sly, too. It makes me feel hot all over. It can't go on."

"No, it can't go on," agreed Jacob, and looked at her very steadily.

She knew his speech had an intention other than her own, but she was not ready to face that yet. "We shall have to give up saying 'Good-night' altogether," she said.

Jacob dropped his eyes and looked moody.

"Well, shan't we, dear?" she persisted. "You

wouldn't like people to say horrid things about me? "

"They couldn't do that," said Jacob.

"They could, and they will," asseverated Betty.

"Damn them!" muttered Jacob — a speech which showed very clearly that he realized the change in his own attitude. He thought less now of sacrificing himself for Betty than of cursing the people who stood for the convention that intervened between himself and his desires.

"You may curse them, but they're there all the same," was Betty's evasion.

"Yes, they will always be there, for ever and ever and ever," said Jacob.

They parted a little coldly that night.

6.

Their troubles were added to by the fact that the house was over-full — three Australian young women, who had come over to England for the first time in order to be present at the Diamond Jubilee, were sleeping out, but had all their meals at Mrs. Parmenter's.

Betty was driven, and Jacob saw less and less of her. Despite the fact that it was high May and the country was calling to them, they rarely got away from Montague Street on more than one or two afternoons in the week — and the "Good-night" had been definitely abandoned for the time being.

Jacob cursed the Jubilee. He had never been interested in it, and it was keeping his copy out of the *Daily Post* which, like every other paper, found it necessary to devote great barren spaces of description to the topic of the hour. Everyone was sick of the word "Jubilee" long before the ceremony, but the slump in seats was, of course, attributed to the fear of

overcrowding. No private venture, probably, has been killed by over-advertisement; but the public ceremonial which is advertised gratuitously always runs that risk. Curiously, the individuals who make the crowd of would-be sightseers seldom understand their own feelings. As the day approaches, they attribute their half-heartedness to fear of a risk they would never have considered if the procession announcements had been sprung upon them a week before the actual date.

Jacob, who had never been susceptible to the emotions stirred in the majority by the sight of crowned heads and military uniforms, grew to regard the whole function with positive detestation. He saw it as something designed to cause him discomfort, not to say misery, and once, when Betty, with the best intentions and without the least reference to economic theory, remarked that the Jubilee was good for trade, he spent a patient ten minutes in demonstrating that, economically, that was an exploded fallacy.

Betty smiled. "Well, it's good for *our* trade," she said.

"I wish to God I could take you away from it," replied Jacob with fervour.

That was the first explicit statement of the change in his attitude, and Betty put it firmly on one side with, "Well, you can't, dear, so it's no use wishing." But another barrier was broken down by this open expression, and now that the thing had been openly spoken of once, it was not long before it came up again.

At first it was no more than an occasional thread in the texture of their conversation — a thread that stood out by contrast; some daring sentence of Jacob's which hinted what he yet feared to put in plain words. In his own room, afterwards, he would

recall that sentence as the one essential thing he had said that day.

He had not as yet formed any definite scheme in his own mind; he had not planned to break down Betty's opposition. But he was conscious of his own desire, and it was so near the surface that, once the restraint imposed had been broken through, his desire became more and more plainly expressed.

Sometimes he made resolves; remembered that he had promised to be content with proximity to his beloved, and with fine determination put the thought of any alternative to the present position away from him.

That spirit never lasted longer than a couple of days. He would have had more restraint if he could have regarded Betty's present occupation and welfare with contentment. But more and more it came home to him that she was wasting her young life in work that was unworthy of her.

"Why should Betty do the work of a servant?" was a question that became ever more insistent. He chafed and worried, and could find no reason why she should.

7.

One day early in July the fire which had so long smouldered and smoked broke into flame.

The Jubilee procession was over, London had come out of its packing-cases again, the reviews at Aldershot and Spithead were forgotten by everyone but the historians, and the Colonial, American, and foreign crowds were dispersing to their homes again. The *Daily Post* was printing Jacob's delayed copy, and there were three rooms empty in Montague Place.

In these ways the prospects were brighter, but a casual incident gave the necessary touch to that smouldering stack, and set the fire blazing.

It was a very small thing; it was remarkable that it had not happened before.

It just chanced that one morning Jacob discovered in the middle of breakfast that he had forgotten to put a handkerchief in his pocket before coming down. He did not particularly require a handkerchief, but the knowledge that he was without one immediately induced the belief that a handkerchief was urgently needed. There were only Franklin and two of the Germans at the table — Mrs. Parmenter did not put in an appearance until the second breakfast at nine o'clock, so Jacob went up to his room to supply his needs.

He found Betty making his bed.

"Hallo!" he said. "Why are *you* doing my room this morning?"

"I always do it, silly-billy," replied Betty. "What do *you* want? You can't have finished breakfast."

"I came up for a handkerchief," he explained.

She made way for him to enter the room by pushing the bed back against the wall.

"I don't like your doing my room," said Jacob.

"I don't like your coming up and stopping me at my work," replied Betty. "Here's your handkerchief"— it was lying on the chest of drawers —"now run away and finish your breakfast."

He made no further demur at that time, but the thought of the incident was very present with him that morning.

He was a little touched by it. He was grateful to her for the attention she had shown him. He might have known that no housemaid would have kept

his room so clean, and have always had it ready for him by the time he had finished breakfast.

But anger and revolt were the dominant emotions in his mind. Why should Betty do everything? If the maids had too much to do, why didn't old Parmenter get another, or help to do the bedrooms herself?

Betty had leisure to go out that afternoon, and they went to the Regent's Park. It was there that, at last, the flame showed through the smoke, and presently consumed it.

They had a seat to themselves in the Broad Walk. They had been more silent than usual during their walk. Jacob was still warm with indignation, and Betty's intuition told her that some outbreak was coming.

It began inauspiciously.

"I say, dear," said Jacob, as soon as they were seated, "I want to talk to you about doing my room."

"Don't I do it properly?" asked Betty.

"Beautifully," he answered; "but why can't the housemaid do it?"

"She's busy with the breakfast."

"Or old Parmenter?"

"She isn't up."

"Well, she ought to be up."

Betty gave him her hand. "Now, don't be silly, dear," she said. "I don't mind doing your room in the very least, and there's no reason on earth why I shouldn't do it that I can see."

"You do everything."

"Yes; even take the boarders out for walks in the afternoon."

"You can easily get out of that duty, if you want to."

"I don't want to," said Betty, and squeezed his hand.

"Oh my dear, I wish I could take you away from this filthy boarding-house," he said.

"It's a very clean boarding-house," replied Betty. She had become used to the sound of this aspiration now; it no longer frightened her.

"I mean it, dear," said Jacob.

"I know you do," she answered.

"Isn't it possible?"

"You know it isn't."

"Not ever?"

"Not unless. . ." That sentence was always left incomplete. They both felt that it was a horrible thing to desire the death of any human being.

"She might live to be eighty," returned Jacob moodily.

"Well, then, what's the good of worrying about impossibilities?"

"Betty darling, is it really an impossibility?"

"You know it is," she repeated.

"Why?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I thought we had agreed not to talk about it," she said.

"I *must* talk about it," said Jacob.

"Oh! what *is* the good?" she asked plaintively.

"We shall have to face it sooner or later," said Jacob. "I can see that. I don't know how it is we have kept quiet so long. I don't know how I have, anyway. We may just as well face it now. Things can't go on as they are."

"I don't see why they shouldn't," urged Betty. "The house will be nearly empty in August, and we can see lots of one another then."

"That only makes it worse," replied Jacob.

This was a plain exposition — plainer than any-

thing they had ever approached before. Hitherto it had been the difficulty of meeting which had been the staple of his complaint. When he said plainly that closer intercourse between them "only made it worse," he opened an entirely new aspect of the situation.

"I can't understand you," expostulated Betty. "You're always complaining because you don't see enough of me, and now you say that seeing me makes it worse."

"It'll have to come to an end."

It was her turn to ask "Why?" now, and he couldn't tell her.

"Why shouldn't we go on as we are?" she insisted.

"Because mere friendship is impossible between *us*," he said, hoping she would understand.

She knitted her brows and stared at the flower-beds. "*I'm* quite content," she said, after a pause.

"I'm not," said Jacob, on a rising note. "I'm not content, in the first place, to see you waste your life in doing the work of a general servant. And in the second, I'm not content to go on from year to year waiting for you, with no prospect of things ever getting any better. I'm not content to grow old in the vain hope of one day being able to marry you. I want you now, while we are both young. . . . Oh! don't you understand?"

"But it isn't possible," said Betty stubbornly.

"It is! . . . If you are brave enough."

"I'm brave enough. It isn't that . . . but it isn't right."

"It *is* right," said Jacob. "It's right to be brave, and grasp happiness when you see it. It's wrong to waste our lives for the sake of a convention."

"Convention?" she put in.

"Yes, it *is* only a convention. There's nothing

illegal about it. It's only public opinion one is afraid of. We have plenty of precedents, surely, among people who were certainly decent people enough, and much cleverer than you or I — the Godwins, the Shelleys, George Eliot. . . . If my wife had the decency to divorce me, you wouldn't mind. Does it alter the morals of the thing because she is spiteful?"

Betty was silent.

"Does it, dear? Does the fact that we can't take advantage of the law just because my wife has some silly ideas about divorce — they're quite new, by the way; she was divorced before — does that make our going away together immoral?"

"You know in your heart it isn't right," persisted Betty.

"I don't," said Jacob. "I know you don't care enough to risk everything for me."

She put that on one side. "Do you really mean that you think it would be right for us to — to go away together?" she still persisted.

He looked steadily into her eyes. "I do really," he said.

"Since when?" asked Betty. "You didn't think so once. . . ."

8.

Jacob saw the epitome of his life in these five words of hers. This was the most representative thing she could have said of him. She regarded it as a reproof, he as high praise; and that was the essential difference, not only between her and him, but between him and the mass of mankind.

He had dared to question life. At first the process had been tentative, fearful; even now it was

half-hearted, but he had dared in small ways while he had lacked the courage to make open profession.

How small, indeed, had been the beginnings, and his first question had been induced by the suggestion of an erotic, beautiful girl and the pressure of his own inclination. But that on one side; it was not representative, though it had been the means of breaking up the inertia of submission which had held him till then. It had been training; it had exercised and developed an independent habit of mind.

No! He saw the true beginnings of his question in that time when he had first come to London. Aunt Hester, before she left him, had laid down certain rules for him: that it was not safe to ride on the tops of buses; that Regent Street was unsafe after dark; that you would most certainly go to hell if you did not attend Divine Service once a week and receive the Holy Communion three times a year.

Those first rules he had proved to be false in their application to himself. He had safely ridden on the tops of many buses; and he had walked down Regent Street after sunset and come to no harm. He could not say with certainty that the statement about the punishment which followed laxity in church attendances was untrue — no one could be absolutely certain — but he was just as sure now of its falseness as Aunt Hester had been of its universal verity.

Thus he was coming by degrees to question every premiss. He only saw now that this was the logical outcome of his discovery that one small rule had been demonstrated to be false. And why not? Was it so sure that the complicated tradition which had grown up accretion by accretion was a universal truth? When one thought of history, it seemed rather that this building upon tradition was always carried to a point at which the foundation at last

failed, and the whole top-heavy structure fell with a crash. Thus all civilizations and the laws upon which they were built had become piled up and up until they collapsed. Tradition started from an apex and spread out like an inverted pyramid till the whole thing overbalanced.

At the back of it all — of all this intricate and complicated structure of religions, laws, and conventions — was human originality and human fallibility. Why speak of the wisdom that comes from experience, when it was not the experience but the tradition which was the foundation, which bore the weight of the whole mass, and which, when men put a question to the test, was the essential law.

The matter was very plain to him, as he sat on that seat in the Broad Walk, with Betty beside him, charging him with the accusation that he had not once thought as he thought now; but how was it possible for him to make it equally plain to her? How could he begin in her mind the process which had been carried so far in his own? He did not doubt — having nothing but his own experience to guide him — that once the process were started, she, too, would proceed to question as he had done; that she would come to understand that law was expediency, that convention was another word for convenience; and that the true guide to morals was the dictates of the individual conscience, when her mind had been freed from the teachings contained in the cumbrous statute-book of the particular creed in which she had been educated.

9.

He searched his mind for an illustration.

"Is it difficult for you to understand," he said, after a long pause, "that the one thing upon which

I most pride myself is the fact that I *can* alter my point of view? "

"When it suits you," she replied instantly, her feminine wit leaping to attack the most pregnable point of his defence.

"Yes, when it suits me and when it does *not* suit me," he said slowly. His mind was far slower than hers. "The person who will not alter his mind because it does suit him to do so, is just as bigoted and narrow as the person who will not alter his mind because it does *not* suit him."

"I don't see that," said Betty. "One is being true to the teachings of his Church, perhaps, and the other is just being selfish."

"Why should anyone be true to the teaching of the Church in defiance of their own common sense? "

"Because one is not able to criticize the teaching of the Church. It's . . . oh, well, it's the teaching of Christ."

"Very little of it," replied Jacob. "And some of that is not applicable to our own day."

"I can't argue about these things," said Betty. "I don't know enough about them. I just know it's right."

That impregnable position!

Yet Jacob endeavoured to throw one gleam of light into the dark places of her mind.

"Well, we won't argue, dear," he said; "but may I just take one instance? "

She nodded, a little sulkily, he thought.

"Yes, dear," he said; "but you mustn't stick out your chin and draw your eyebrows together and say to yourself: 'I'll listen to please him, but I am quite determined not to believe a single word he says.' "

"I wasn't," replied Betty.

"Won't you try? " he said, still struggling to over-

come that awful inertia of mind which sometimes opposes an irresistible obstruction to all reason — "won't you try, just for once, to reason a little point for yourself? It has nothing to do with you and me. It's just an instance, that's all."

"I'm not clever enough," pleaded Betty.

"Quite clever enough for this," he urged.

"Well, go on," she said.

He hesitated a moment, still feeling the hopelessness of trying to persuade a mind that was firmly resolved to oppose him, and then said: "I saw in the *Daily Post* a few days ago that a parson at some seaside place had turned two young women out of church because they came to service without hats on. There was a big scene, and afterwards the parson appears to have taken up the position that the women had done a blasphemous and wicked thing."

"I think he was quite right," said Betty.

"Good! Now, dear, just for once, will you try and think out *why* you think he was right."

"Well, St. Paul distinctly says . . ."

"Yes, I know. Who was St. Paul?"

"An apostle."

"Not in this connection. He was a Syrian Jew, who was largely influenced by his early training. He had been, doubtless, taught to believe when he was young that women had no souls, and though he was forced to make that admission, he still adhered to the belief that women were mere objects for the gratification of men's desire, and that, therefore, not only their heads, but their faces (he certainly meant to include both), should be covered in the temple. I looked up the passage in Corinthians when the fuss was on. What St. Paul says is: 'For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, for as much as he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the

glory of man.' Now, Betty dear, please use your common sense in this instance, and tell me why we in nineteenth-century England should consider it 'blasphemous and wicked' to do a thing because this Syrian Jew, nineteen hundred years ago, had those superstitions and prejudices of the Eastern race with regard to women."

"Well, I suppose there is still some use in it," urged Betty. "A woman ought not to be thinking while she is in church whether men are admiring her hair."

"Oh, you dear little silly thing!" laughed Jacob. "And yet she may spend ten guineas on a hat. Is that hat for the purpose of hiding and obscuring her beauty? And when, a few years ago, women wore a bonnet the size of a small teacup, that was, of course, quite sufficient to prevent men thinking of their hair. If the fashions ordained that a hat was to be no more than a knot of ribbon, that, of course, would be enough. Oh my dear, my dear! won't you use your intelligence about these things?"

"It does seem rather silly in this case," admitted Betty.

"It's only one instance out of a million," returned Jacob. "Once admit that any of these observances, rituals, dogmas, conventions, are palpably foolish, and you give away your whole case. Try and think, dear — try and think."

That conversation did, indeed, give her cause for much thought.

CHAPTER XXV

CLIMAX

I.

Betty sought for guidance, and found none. Her attitude had become mainly one of stubborn resistance.

Now that the subject was no longer forbidden, it was always creeping into their conversation. One reiterated phrase of Jacob's rang in her mind constantly when she was alone: "But, Betty dear, can't you see . . . ?"

As yet she could not see. She was always affirming her blindness.

There were days when Jacob avoided that subject with a nervous diligence that made her smile secretly; she guessed that his mood was one of tenderness; that he was deliberately restraining himself to save her. So often she showed that she disliked that subject, and it was after these scenes that he made such tacit apology — after some little display of temper on her part aroused by his persistent, though still detached, argument. For he still maintained his ethical tone; he did not plead on a personal note; he did not say openly: "Won't you do this for my sake?" although that plea was often implicit in his argument.

One day at the beginning of August he avoided not only that subject, but herself also.

They had made no arrangements for the afternoon, but now that the house was comparatively empty, it had become an understood thing that they spent the

afternoons together, even if they did not go out. Sometimes when it was wet they sat in the dining-room, which was nearly always unoccupied by boarders at that time of the day.

Betty came up from her kitchen at a quarter to three somewhat reluctantly. They had had a long discussion the afternoon before, and she felt disinclined to open the subject again. She hoped earnestly that he might be in a repentant mood.

She found both drawing-room and dining-room unoccupied, and sat down in the latter room to wait for him. She supposed that he had gone upstairs, and would return immediately. For a few minutes she stood at the window, and then, as he did not come, she sat down and picked up a book.

Half an hour passed, and she began to wonder what had become of him. She closed the book, went to the door, opened it, and listened. The house was very quiet, the only sound the voices of the two maids talking in the kitchen.

Betty pursed her mouth and frowned.

"Well, I'm not going to look for him," she said to herself, and returned to her chair and her book. She thought it a very dull book.

But at the end of another quarter of an hour she began to feel anxious. It was so unlike Jimmy (he had taught her to call him Jimmy, and she never thought of him by any other name). Was it possible that anything had happened to him?

She went to the door again, and, after a brief hesitation, ran up to the second floor. She sang to herself as she went. If he was upstairs, sulking for some reason, she did not wish him to think that she had been at all perturbed by his absence.

She sang a little louder as she passed his door, but she did not stop; she climbed up to the attics. She

stayed up there for two or three minutes, and fear began to take hold of her again. Suppose he had done something dreadful.

She came down and stood listening at Jacob's door. Then she knocked, and as there was no answer, opened the door and looked in.

It was a shock to her to find that he was not there — she had been picturing him in that room — and she went quickly down to her partner's bedroom on the first floor.

Mrs. Parmenter was lying on her bed. She looked up stupidly as Betty entered. "Oh dear! I was just dropping off," said Mrs. Parmenter tartly.

"Was Mr. Stahl in to lunch?" asked Betty.

"Dear, dear, yes, I suppose so," returned Mrs. Parmenter. "Why?"

"Did he give you any message for me?" asked Betty.

Mrs. Parmenter sat up. Her sleep was quite broken now. She clicked her tongue. "To be sure," she said. "It quite slipped my memory. He told me to say he had to go to the Museum this afternoon." Betty closed the door behind her, none too gently.

Mrs. Parmenter clicked her tongue again and frowned. . . .

It was a perfectly reasonable explanation. She had many times disappointed him with some excuse or another. Sometimes she had sent him a message to say she could not come out, at others she had not even done as much as that, but had kept him on tenterhooks all the afternoon. On one such occasion he had come down to the kitchen, and been severely reproved by her. She had told him that he must not expect her to come as a right, that any day she might have to stay in and work.

But this was the first time that he had turned the tables upon her. She knew that she couldn't justly blame him, but she was angry with him nevertheless. He ought to have waited until she came up to the dining-room, and then explained why he couldn't go out with her. He had no right . . .

She paused on that statement. Had she not argued with herself that he ought to go away, that she ought never to see him again? As to his right, he had a right to do as he pleased, surely. He certainly had a right to avoid her altogether, if he so wished.

She had returned to the dining-room, and she stood at the window staring out at the uninspiriting vision, the back of the British Museum.

She pictured a future with Jacob gone out of her life, with no other interest than the dull routine of cooking food and clearing it away again. She sighed hopelessly. It was a rather forlorn Betty that went down to the kitchen to get the tea ready.

While she was in the basement she heard the front door slam, and thought Jacob had returned. Her heart leapt joyfully. It had been a very dull afternoon. But she did not mean to let him see that it had been dull.

She came up from the kitchen singing, to find that it was not Jacob, but Mr. Franklin who had come in. He explained that he had come home early because he was going for his holidays next day.

Betty stayed in the drawing-room until nearly six o'clock, but still Jacob had not returned.

She listened for him all the time that she was cooking the dinner, and her work often took her to the table under the window.

At a quarter-past seven she saw him go past. He looked very depressed and miserable, she thought, and

he did not look down at the kitchen window, as he generally did.

2.

She sat up until the boarders had gone to bed that evening in order to wish Jacob "Good-night." He had sat in a corner reading after dinner, and had hardly looked at her.

When the room was empty — Mrs. Blakey was away, and Mr. Franklin and Miss Dalkeith cleared off very soon after Mrs. Parmenter — Jacob put down his book and came over to her.

"Well?" he said sadly, and put his hands on her shoulders.

"Well!" she said, as brightly as she could. "And where have you been all the afternoon?"

He sat down by her — he had not even kissed her yet — and lighted a cigarette. "I've been at the Museum," he said. "Didn't Mrs. Parmenter give you my message?"

"Not till four o'clock," replied Betty.

"I'm sorry. Were you waiting for me?"

"Oh no. It was all right."

They sat still for a few seconds, nervously rigid. They were like two electrified atoms ready to rush together or fly apart at the slightest impulse. Whether they were charged attractively or repulsively, neither knew.

"What's to be done?" asked Jacob at last.

"There's nothing to be done that I can see," said Betty. A spirit of perversity seized her as she spoke. She was nervously desperate to-night. The experience of the afternoon had worked upon her. She was ready to throw herself into his arms, to concede everything; or, on the other hand, to put an end to

the situation by telling him to go out of her life. She hardly knew which alternative she more desired. . . .

If only he would be strong, brutal; if he would but hold her and command her; say he could not live without her, plead on the personal note. . . . But the ethical argument she could not stand — not to-night. . . .

He did not look at her. "If that is how you feel about it," he said, "I don't see that it's any use our seeing each other so often."

"Perhaps not," she said.

He got up and stood on the hearthrug, looking down at her. She sat very still, her fingers interlaced in her lap.

"Do you mean that this is to be the end?" he asked.

"If you are not content that things should go on as they are," she said.

"Well, I'm *not*," replied Jacob.

She shrugged her shoulders with a little impatient movement. She longed to tell him that she would do all he wished, if he would be intimate, importunate, strong. But to tell him would put him in a forced position. She wanted a natural expression, not histrionics.

"It's no use going into it again," he said, after a pause.

"Please not," replied Betty, with a shiver. Least of all did she desire logical argument.

"Anyway, I won't see you to-morrow," he said. He took a step towards the door, paused, looked at her for one long moment, and then went out, shutting the door quietly behind him.

Betty sat still, tense, listening. She heard his footsteps on the stairs, up the straight long flight from

the ground floor, on the landing, up the second flight, then she lost them; but, after a second, she heard his door slam.

She still sat rigid, listening, though there was no sound now in all the house. Outside, the usual procession of hansoms going north from the theatres had begun. . . .

She was fighting a wild impulse to follow him up to his room. . . . That was impossible: there were other people sleeping on that floor, and the walls were none too thick. . . . Impossible, quite impossible. . . .

She rose and yawned elaborately, unnaturally, put the lights out, and went slowly down to her own room. On the basement stairs she stopped and listened again. She thought she heard someone moving. If he came down, now . . . No, he wasn't coming. Just as well, perhaps. . . .

When she was in her own room she sat down on the edge of the bed. It seemed to her that her mind was singularly free from all emotions. And then, quite suddenly, something took hold of her roughly and shook her. She found that her shoulders were heaving. "Oh! What is the matter?" gasped Betty. "Oh! I can't help it . . . I can't help it." The tears were streaming.

She had never been hysterical before, and she fought against the strange possession — fought fiercely. She flung herself on the bed and tried to stifle her sobs. Her whole body was being brutally, savagely shaken. "Oh, oh!" she moaned: "I *can't* help it — I *can't* help it." The words merged into a meaningless repetition. . . .

She could not control those awful, gasping sobs that shook her from head to foot. . . .

Jacob in his room lay with tired eyes that would not close, cursing the night.

3.

He slept for an hour or two between three and six o'clock, but at half-past six he got up and dressed. It was a glorious morning, even in London.

"I'll go right out into the country," thought Jacob. In the past he had frequently taken these lonely excursions into the country when he had been passing through some crisis of experience. He remembered earlier occasions as he dressed. They stood out in retrospect as notable objects on a traversed road.

It was only seven o'clock when he went downstairs. He caught sight of the housemaid in the dining-room, but he did not speak to her. He took his straw hat from the hall-stand and went out.

The sun was already high and the streets were hot. Jacob thanked Heaven that he could get out of this fiery desert of London. He walked down to Oxford Street, and then, seeing a hansom, he hailed it and drove to Waterloo.

He found a buffet open, and had breakfast there. He was not hungry, but he was glad to get some tea. He decided to take a train which left at eight o'clock on the Thames Valley Line. For no particular reason he elected to go to Hampton.

The train was stuffy and hot, and though he had, automatically, chosen to travel in a smoking carriage, he did not want to smoke. The train did not stop between Clapham and Richmond, and he fell asleep. There was no other passenger in his compartment.

Arrived at Hampton, he made straight for the river, and when he reached the church, he turned to the right through the village, then to the left past the waterworks, and so came to the quiet shelter of the lane that goes on to Sunbury.

For a time he stood and watched the swans in the little backwater behind the island. It was nearly ten o'clock now, and already one or two boats were out.

"There'll be a crowd this afternoon," he reflected, "being the Saturday before Bank Holiday."

He was beginning to feel a little tired when he reached Sunbury, and did not know where to rest. He looked critically at one or two hotels, and thought of going to sit on one of the lawns behind them, which he knew ran down to the river. But he couldn't do that unless he ordered something to drink, and, although he was not averse to that prospect, he reflected that he could not stay on the hotel lawn all the morning on the strength of one drink.

A little farther on, the ferry attracted his attention, and he remembered that he might go and sit by the lock for as long as he liked without making payment in any form.

The ferryman remarked that this weather would be all right for the 'oliday, if it larsted.

"Rather," assented Jacob.

The lock afforded him plenty of entertainment. Everyone seemed to be going up the river. The down lock was nearly empty every time.

His mind seemed to be void of any ideas. He just sat and watched the crowd. None of the girls he saw reminded him of Betty, though many of them were very attractive, he thought.

Now and again a spasm of loneliness attacked him. He wondered why all these young men had pretty girls to go up the river with them, while he was always alone.

At one o'clock he crossed the river again in the ferry and had lunch at one of the Sunbury hotels. And afterwards he sat on the lawn and smoked and

watched the river. For a time he dozed. The lap of the river, the sound of creaking rowlocks, the splash of oars, and the distant sound of voices, were very soothing and restful.

But a little after three o'clock he roused himself, and decided to walk on by the towpath to Halliford, so he crossed the river for the third time.

It was a brilliant afternoon, but the sight of the river seemed to mitigate the heat a little, and he stuck to the towpath until he reached Walton, when he cut off a corner by going straight across the end of the bridge, and then along a footpath through the meadow on the farther side until he was nearly at the waterworks.

When he reached the ferry at Halliford, he was feeling hot and exhausted.

Tea refreshed him, and he sat on the tiny little strip of lawn, separated by the width of the road from the hotel which had served him. He felt that he had made a long journey. It seemed an incalculable time ago that he had stood by the backwater behind the Sunbury island. . . .

4.

He had not thought of his problem all day. He had been in one of his old moods of detached observation. But the sight of a young man and woman at one of the other little round tables near him, began to stir him to a reflection on his own concerns.

What did he propose to do?

"Do you mind my sitting here for a bit? I'm rather tired," he asked the waiter who came to clear away his tea-things.

The waiter hesitated, but a shilling tip stimulated his inventive powers.

"Fetch you a nammock-chair, sir," he said, and added confidentially: "We're rather busy to-day, and the tables might be wanted."

"Stay there 's'long 's'you like, sir," he said, when the chair had been brought and placed overlooking the river, its back to the tables. "Thank you, sir. Grand weather for the 'olidays."

What did he propose to do?

There was one possibility which appealed to him. He might hang about until it was nearly dark, and then go up past Shepperton Lock to the lonely bit of towpath that followed the river to Chertsey. There was a quiet corner there, he knew, where the river was very deep. When it was quite dark, and all the boats had gone home, he might slip quietly in and settle the whole problem once and for all.

It was not the first time he had contemplated that solution of life, but never had it appealed to him as it did now. It would be so quiet and simple: a little choking and gasping, and then perfect stillness, and the river gently flowing and lapping over him. He must find some heavy stones and put them in his pockets.

Undoubtedly that was the best thing to do. There were three or four books he had in hand for Gresswell, but they were not very important. It would not be such a serious matter if no review of them appeared in the *Daily Post*.

He wondered what Betty would feel about it. . . .

5.

Absurd to say she wouldn't care. Of course she would care. He did not doubt that. But would she be heart-broken?

What a fate for her to be shut up from year's end

to year's end in that horrible boarding-house — cooking and cleaning up!

Just Heaven! Was that Betty's preordained destiny?

But if she really cared, why would she not risk all, dare all? Was it because she thought it was right?"

No. He did not believe it. He was so sure of himself now that he could not believe any dogma could prevent Betty. She had admitted lately that she was losing her faith in those dogmas.

Cowardice! That was the only answer. She was afraid — not of God or of herself, but of what people would think and say. Mrs. Parmenter, Mrs. Blakey, her father and sisters, perhaps. . . .

That was what he suffered from, too; he was a coward. Most people were, if you come to that. It was not their moral sense which guided them, but their sense of propriety — and propriety in most cases meant fear of other people's opinion. That put aside the religions which ruled by the fear of hell; there was so obviously nothing moral in that.

At the back of everything one found fear, and he was as guilty as the rest of the world. He had been afraid to press Betty openly. He had sheltered himself behind a philosophic argument, and tried to convert her to his own opinion, because he had feared to take the responsibility of persuading her by making a direct appeal.

He had been to blame. There was excuse for her. She had never dared to examine life; had been taught that it was wrong to examine life, just as Roman Catholics were taught that it was wrong to read their Bibles. The motive of each attitude was the same — the teacher was afraid that the pupil might learn to think for himself. There was his own case. How

one had been jumped upon for daring any original opinion! . . .

Fear! The root evil! And here he sat and proposed to himself the final act of cowardice — because he did not dare to win Betty by sheer force of character; because he was afraid to take upon himself the burden of another person's conscience.

It was so despicably easy to be good; that was the trouble. It was just subservience — a walking in the broad, easy path that had been laid out. It was so desperately hard to do what the world — cowards all — regarded as evil; oh! infinitely hard. It meant fighting — fighting always. Curious that the theologians should have talked of the broad and easy way that led down to destruction. Why, one had to fight one's way up to destruction, step by step. Heaven knew, the other way was easy enough. One just did nothing.

The fallacy was that what the world regarded as "goodness" was not goodness at all, but just the acceptance of the conventions of society — the doing of the obvious, easy thing. Why should one accept Society's standards of ethics, framed to suit Society's convenience? Ultimately the definition must rest with the individual.

And, Heaven help him, he *would* do the hard thing. He would not run away either from life or from trouble. He would go back and persuade Betty, plead with her, urge her; he would take the responsibility for her conscience and her happiness upon himself. And afterwards, if he succeeded, he would face the world and criticism. He would be a paltering, hair-splitting coward no longer; he would be strong . . .

Jacob Stahl was ever at the beginning of life.

6.

The sun was slanting to the west as he made his way to Shepperton Station.

He was physically tired, but his mind was alert now and vigorous.

He had dinner in a restaurant in the Strand, and then took a bus from Charing Cross to the corner of Bedford Square.

As he turned into Montague Place he saw a woman standing, bareheaded, at the top of the area steps which led down to the basement of Mrs. Parmenter's boarding-house.

She did not move as he came up.

"Betty!" he said. "What are you doing here?"

She looked him full in the eyes. "I've been waiting for you," she said. She gazed into his face, searching him with an unspoken question.

The blazing fury of the day lingered in brick and stone. The pavements radiated heat as if they were fresh from a furnace.

"It has been so hot," murmured Betty, and still watched his face.

She had spent a day of doubt and torture. She looked now to see what his resolution had been. She did not doubt that when he returned he would have arrived at some decision. But she could not read his expression here in this half dark, stifling street. He still seemed to falter. He stood there silent. Surely he must have something to tell her — some determination to express.

"What are you going to do?" she asked at last.

"I can't tell you here," he said. "Put your hat on and come out."

"It's so late — it's nine o'clock," she remonstrated.

"Hadn't we better wait until Mrs. Parmenter has gone to bed?"

"No!" replied Jacob with decision. He was in no doubt at last. The experiences of the day had worked him into a condition of mental exaltation. He was uplifted by a feeling of spiritual power.

"Put your hat on," he said. "Be quick. I'll wait here for you."

She made no further attempt to oppose him.

When she returned, she saw that he had a hansom waiting at the door.

"Where are we going?" she asked, suddenly doubtful and afraid.

"Regent's Park. The Inner Circle." The remark was addressed to the cabman as much as to Betty.

Jacob would not speak in the cab, but he held her hand and kissed it several times.

7.

Jacob dismissed the cab when they reached the part of the Circle most remote from the main entrance to the Botanical Gardens.

"There's a seat here somewhere," he said. "I want to sit down. I've been walking more than usual to-day."

It was very dark under the trees. He put his arm round her neck and drew her face close to his.

At that moment neither of them was self-conscious. They did not speculate as to whether some casual passer-by or patrolling policeman might see them and class them among those lovers who exchange caresses in public without shame. The elemental passions wipe out all distinctions of class and race. It is superficiality, chief characteristic of civilization,

which insists upon self-consciousness, and only a great passion is strong enough to attain the wonder of an independence which can despise the gall of public opinion.

"Betty darling, I want you," whispered Jacob, the dignity of his desire ruling him to the neglect of all smaller things.

She laid her face against his and made no protest.

"We must be brave and strong," he said. "We must make our great declaration of independence, and snap our fingers at the world's opinion. I want you, beloved, and I am going to take you. . . .

"We shall have to fight, Betty dear, but it is a good thing to fight. It won't be easy for us, but we shall be fighting together. To-night I feel that all the world is mine if I have you; but to-morrow and every day I shall be ready to fight, with you . . .

"We must go away together. We must be brave and open. There must be no intrigue and secret meetings, no stealthy shifts and contrivances. Will you come away with me, dear, openly, defiantly?"

A faint, hot wind stirred the leaves of the trees which overshadowed them. A spirit of wakeful restlessness whispered for an instant, and then passed, leaving silence.

"Yes! I understand. I will come," said Betty.

For some time they sat very still, very content.

But at last Betty withdrew herself from his arms. "We must be going back, dear," she said.

"Back to the House of Tribulation," said Jacob. "But it won't be for long."

"No, it won't be for long," she echoed.*

* The further history of Jacob and Betty will be told in another volume.

EPILOGUE

As we look back upon life, we can often single out some particular influence, and say: "That was significant; that altered the circumstance of my life." It may be that the influence was apparently fortuitous, that it was sprung upon us, a sudden intrusion which upset the conduct of our affairs, or, more profound in its effect, changed our attitude towards the problem of existence. But in the happening, such influences, whether they have entered by some unperceived process, or have unexpectedly overwhelmed us, are seldom marked as indicative of any new outset. More often it is the unimportant thing, a change of residence, of plan, or of occupation, that at the time is regarded as indicative. . . .

To Jacob Stahl, so often at some new outset and ever suffering an unconscious process of development, came no revelation that night under the trees in Regent's Park; no glimpse of a future that was to be differentiated so sharply from his past. He in the midst, was conscious only of that which had gone before; he felt his forward way blindly, with no guide save the feeble precedent of his experience, and relying little enough upon that. He wanted Betty, wanted her with an absence of doubt and a certainty of fervour that was new to him. Whatever question had arisen in his mind, there had been none of his love for Betty. Yet with the feebleness that was characteristic of him, he had halted between two ideals — the old ideal of a self-sacrifice that was not pur-

posive, and the new ideal of a courage to grasp and hold. But when he had chosen, elected this time to fight himself by fighting the world, he did not realize his own fundamental change of attitude; he did not understand that, at last, he was looking out instead of in. Nor could he see as yet that, as the outcome of this last choice, he had linked himself — how finally neither of them could foresee — with one who would react upon him and uphold him in his resolutions. He was indeed at a turn of the road which opened out a new prospect.

Character, it may be objected, does not change; the weak man does not suddenly become strong. But it is certain that as physical surroundings will alter race characteristics, or that a change of life may effect a change of habit, so will an ever-present influence develop the character upon which it works.

And so, inasmuch as from this point of his life onwards Jacob Stahl was subject to a new and powerful influence, it seems well that at this point should be put a period to this stage of his history.

Until that decision and the statement of it, there had been no true community of interest between him and the woman he had determined to win; the very nature of their situation precluded any unity of outlook. Hereafter they were bound by this common understanding and purpose, and, despite all inevitable reactions of feeling and lapses from the persistence of high endeavour, there remained this mutual resolve to live for each other. . . .

That was definitive. That in its outcome was the final mould of Jacob Stahl's life.

THE END

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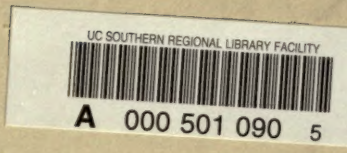

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